

Behavioral Patterns and Identity Expression in University Students' Uniform-Wearing: A Quantitative Study

Issarapong Poltanee* and Umaporn Boonphetkaew

Department of Hospitality and MICE Business, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus,
Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

E-mail: issarapong.p@ku.th* and faasupb@ku.ac.th

*Corresponding author

(Received: 5 January 2026, Revised: 28 May 2026, Accepted: 22 June 2026)

<https://doi.org/10.57260/csdj.2026.286170>

Abstract

Despite growing scholarly interest in the sociocultural functions of student uniforms, empirical research on uniform-wearing Behavior in Southeast Asian higher education remains limited, particularly regarding the interplay between digital self-presentation and institutional dress norms. This study investigated the Behavior and motivations behind student uniform wearing at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus. A quantitative survey was administered to 392 undergraduate students selected through stratified random sampling across nine faculties. Data were analysed using Welch's One-Way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and Random Forest classification.

Enhancing personal image ($F = 12.66$, $p < .001$) and expressing social status ($F = 6.24$, $p = .006$) were the primary motivators, whereas institutional regulations and comfort showed no significant effect ($p > .05$). Academic year was the strongest predictor of wearing frequency (Feature Importance = 0.35), with third-year students exhibiting the highest frequency. Although students from the Faculty of Education constituted a smaller share of the sample (9.18%) than the Faculty of Service Industries (32.65%), their individual mean wearing frequency was the highest among all faculties, reflecting a strong teacher-centric professional culture.

These findings indicate that uniform wearing among university students extends beyond regulatory compliance to encompass identity formation and social expression. The results carry practical implications for developing dress-code policies that balance institutional traditions with students' evolving needs in the digital era.

Keywords: Uniform wearing behavior, Motivation, Professional culture

Introduction

Student uniforms in higher education have traditionally been understood as markers of institutional membership and discipline. Yet three notable gaps persist in the literature. First, empirical evidence on uniform-wearing Behavior in Southeast Asian universities remains scarce, despite distinct sociocultural norms that differ markedly from Western contexts (Bunyawanich et al., 2018). Second, although digital self-presentation has reshaped how young adults construct and communicate identity (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016; Shumaker et al., 2017), the intersection between social-media influence and institutional dress practices has not been systematically examined. Third, a conceptual gap exists between the regulatory framing of uniforms as instruments of compliance and the lived experience of students who treat dress as a vehicle for image construction and social signalling (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). This study addresses these gaps by investigating the Behavior and motivations behind uniform wearing among undergraduate students at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, using a combination of traditional inferential statistics and machine-learning classification.

In Thailand, Kasetsart University stands as a higher education institution with a long-standing history and a distinguished reputation in educational development. Its origins trace back to the Primary Agricultural Teacher Training School established in 1917, before its formal founding in 1943, eventually growing into one of the nation's leading universities (Kasetsart University, 2024). The Kamphaeng Saen Campus, a key component of the university, is notable for its expansive grounds and diverse academic disciplines, underpinned by a robust organizational culture. This culture is reflected in the use of student uniforms, which have evolved since 1951. The design of Kasetsart University's uniforms blends international elements with local identity, exemplified by the white shirt adorned with the emblem of Phra Pirun riding a naga, symbolizing not only institutional pride but also a connection to national cultural heritage (Kasetsart University, 2024). These uniforms have been continually refined to align with modern times, balancing functionality with social appropriateness.

Nevertheless, contemporary societal shifts, particularly influences from Western culture and digital technology, have introduced new challenges to the use of student uniforms. Recent studies indicate that social media plays a pivotal role in shaping dress patterns among higher education students, fostering new modes of self expression through dress (Shumaker et al., 2017). Furthermore, McVeigh (1997) argues that uniforms in educational institutions carry deep ideological significance, functioning as tools for disciplining bodies and minds while simultaneously reflecting institutional efforts to preserve cultural values amid globalisation.

From an institutional management perspective, understanding how digital self-presentation reshapes uniform compliance is not merely an academic exercise. Without such evidence, dress code revisions, faculty identity branding, and student engagement policies rest on untested assumptions, with consequences for both the legitimacy of institutional regulations and students' sense of belonging (Baumann & Krskova, 2016). This study therefore has direct relevance for higher-education administrators seeking to align traditional dress norms with the realities of a digitally connected student body.

Within this context, examining the Behaviors and motivations behind student uniform wearing is essential to understanding the factors influencing student decision-making, spanning social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Ansari et al. (2022) demonstrate that uniforms shape Behavioral patterns among students, while Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) highlight the growing weight of external influences such as peer expectations and online social dynamics in shaping appearance-related Behaviors. Consequently, this research on the Behaviors and motivations of uniform wearing among students at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, aims to explore dress patterns, frequency of use, and the factors driving these choices.

It analyses both internal motivations, such as institutional pride, and external influences, such as social media impact. These objectives align with findings suggesting that uniform wearing transcends mere adherence to rules, serving as a process of identity construction and social expression (Di et al., 2026). The study seeks to offer insights that inform the development of dress code policies responsive to the needs of students in the digital era, ensuring both effectiveness and inclusivity.

Research Objectives

1. To characterise patterns of uniform-wearing Behavior (frequency, occasion, and modification) across faculties and academic years.
2. To identify the motivational factors personal image, social status, peer norms, and institutional respect that predict uniform-wearing Behavior.
3. To assess the role of social-media exposure as a correlate of the motivation–Behavior relationship.

Literature Review

The role of student uniforms in higher education has evolved far beyond serving merely as a tool for institutional compliance, emerging as a multifaceted phenomenon intertwined with social identity expression, Behavioral patterns, and cultural dynamics. Research has also extended to the physical and public-health dimensions of uniform policies: Nathan et al. (2021) found that uniform requirements can constrain students' physical activity levels, while Reidy (2021) provided a comprehensive public health review of the evidence on uniforms' effects on both education and health outcomes. Contemporary scholarship has further highlighted the connections between student uniforms and personal image construction, social status, academic progression, professional norms, and the influence of digital technology. This literature review synthesises relevant studies to establish a conceptual framework for interpreting the findings of the present study while identifying gaps in existing knowledge.

Uniforms and the Construction of Image and Social Status

Numerous studies have established that uniforms extend beyond regulatory adherence, serving as instruments for shaping personal image and signalling social status. In a landmark experiment, Adam and Galinsky (2012) demonstrated that wearing specific clothing what they term 'enclothed cognition' systematically alters the wearer's psychological processes, including attention and self-perception. Applied to the university context, this suggests that donning a uniform can actively shape how students see themselves and wish to be seen. Wade and Stafford (2003) found that the introduction of public school uniforms significantly affected students' self-perceptions and perceptions of school climate, indicating that dress norms influence not only individual psychology but also the social environment. More recently, Di et al. (2026) showed that fashion imagery of school uniforms shapes students' psychological capital through a social identification mechanism: wearing the uniform fosters a sense of belonging that, in turn, enhances self efficacy and resilience. Despite these advances, relatively little is known about how these dynamics manifest in Southeast Asian higher education institutions, such as Kasetsart University, where additional cultural factors may exert influence.

Variations in Behavior Across Academic Years

The relationship between academic year and uniform-wearing Behavior has received only partial attention in academic literature. Santos and Marasigan (2021) reported that adherence to dress-code policies among university students is positively associated with self-discipline, and that the strength of this association varies across stages of study. This is consistent with the present study, which identifies academic year as a significant variable

(Feature Importance = 0.35). Specifically, third-year students demonstrate the highest frequency of uniform wearing (median = 0.65), with a noticeable decline in the fourth year. The pattern suggests a developmental arc: students initially adapt to institutional norms, peak in compliance during the middle years, and gradually assert individual identity as graduation approaches a trajectory consistent with Baumann and Krskova's (2016) broader observation that school discipline and uniform practices interact with academic outcomes over time. Further longitudinal analysis is needed to elucidate the factors driving this shift.

Influence of Professional Culture and Inter-Faculty Differences

Professional culture plays a prominent role in shaping uniform-wearing Behavior, particularly in disciplines with strong professional identities. Timmons and East (2011) found that uniforms in professional settings serve as markers of status and establish boundaries between occupational groups, a finding that extends naturally to pre-professional education programmes where students are socialised into their future roles. In the Thai context, Bunyawanch et al. (2018) demonstrated that university uniforms function as instruments of unity, hierarchy, and conformity, with faculties that emphasise public-facing professional roles (such as education) exhibiting stronger adherence. This aligns with the present study's finding that students in the Faculty of Education display the highest frequency of uniform use, reflecting the influence of a teacher centric professional culture that emphasises serving as an exemplary model. These studies collectively underscore the need to account for the diversity of professional cultures when formulating uniform policies.

Influence of Digital Technology and Social Media

The advancement of digital technology, particularly social media, has transformed the ways in which students express themselves through dress. Shumaker et al. (2017) found that female users on Instagram engage in deliberate self-presentation through clothing choices, and that social-media platforms serve as arenas where dress decisions are both displayed and reinforced by peer feedback. Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) provided a broader framework, showing that social media exposure is consistently associated with heightened appearance-related concerns and self monitoring Behaviors. Together, these findings suggest that digital platforms amplify the social significance of dress, including uniforms, by creating additional audiences for self-presentation. However, much of this research has focused on Western populations and general fashion Behavior; the connection between social media and institutional uniform practices in non-Western higher education remains underexplored a gap the present study aims to address.

In sum, the literature reveals that student uniforms play a complex role in shaping personal image, signalling social status, reflecting professional culture, and responding to digital technology's influence. Although prior research has laid a foundation for these themes, it often lacks specific exploration within the Thai context. This study bridges these gaps by employing advanced statistical techniques, such as Welch's ANOVA and Random Forest (Breiman, 2001), to evaluate the weight of factors influencing uniform-wearing Behavior among students at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus.

Methodology

Population and Sample

This study focuses on the population of undergraduate students at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, during the 2024 academic year. The research employed stratified random sampling due to significant methodological considerations, namely the substantial variation in the student population across faculties in terms of both size and distinct characteristics. Stratification by faculty enhances the representativeness of the sample, which is critical for minimizing bias in the research findings.

The sample consisted of 392 students, allocated proportionally to reflect the actual population distribution across faculties, ensuring alignment with the studied population's structure. This approach yielded highly reliable data, enabling effective analysis both by faculty and in aggregate. The determination of sample size and its distribution further improved the precision of population parameter estimation, achieving statistical significance.

Table 1 Allocation of Sample by Faculty at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus

Faculty	Sample Size (Persons)	Percentage (%)
Faculty of Agriculture, Kamphaeng Saen	29	7.40%
Faculty of Engineering, Kamphaeng Saen	40	10.20%
Faculty of Sports Science	59	15.05%
Faculty of Education and Development Studies	36	9.18%
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science	72	18.37%
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine	4	1.02%
Faculty of Fisheries	12	3.06%
Faculty of Environment	12	3.06%
Faculty of Service Industries	128	32.65%
Total	392	100%

Within each stratum (faculty), the researcher employed systematic random sampling to enhance representativeness and reduce sampling error. This method ensured a uniform and comprehensive distribution of the sample across the population within each faculty. The design of this sampling approach enables the research findings to be accurately and reliably generalized to the broader population, while also facilitating effective analysis of inter-faculty differences. This is particularly valuable for addressing the research objectives and applying the study's results to relevant contexts moving forward.

In terms of academic-year composition, the sample comprised Year 1 students (25.50%), Year 2 (27.30%), Year 3 (24.70%), and Year 4 (22.50%), broadly reflecting the registrar's enrolment figures (chi-square goodness-of-fit test, $p > .05$). Year level was subsequently entered as a covariate in the inferential models to account for its potential confounding effect.

Research Instruments

This study utilized a questionnaire as the primary tool for data collection, developed systematically in accordance with principles of social and behavioral science research. The instrument's design was informed by an extensive literature review and relevant theoretical frameworks, ensuring alignment with the research objectives and empirical context. The questionnaire was created in a digital format using Google Forms and comprised three main sections: demographic information, assessment of uniform-wearing behavior, and evaluation

of motivational factors. The first section gathered statistically significant baseline variables related to uniform-wearing behavior, including gender, age, academic year, faculty affiliation, and monthly income. The second section employed closed-ended, single-choice questions to assess specific behavioral variables. The third section utilized a 5-point Likert scale to evaluate the importance of motivational factors influencing uniform wearing among students.

The quality assurance process for the research instrument was rigorous. Content validity was assessed by three experts in educational measurement and evaluation, behavioral sciences, and educational administration. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) analysis yielded values ranging from 0.67 to 1.00 across all items, exceeding the standard threshold of 0.50. Reliability was tested through a pilot study involving 30 students, with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the motivation scale calculated at 0.897, significantly surpassing the acceptable benchmark of 0.70.

The design of the research instrument prioritized bias reduction across multiple dimensions, particularly response bias, through various measures. These included the use of neutral and clear language, avoidance of leading questions, randomization of positive and negative items in the motivation scale to mitigate acquiescence bias, and a concise questionnaire structure to reduce respondent fatigue. Additionally, screening questions were incorporated to verify participants' attentiveness, enhancing the reliability of the collected data.

Regarding research ethics involving human subjects, the study adhered to fundamental ethical principles. Participants were provided with clear information about the research objectives, data usage, and confidentiality measures, and voluntary informed consent was obtained prior to questionnaire completion. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Collected data were securely stored and reported in aggregate form, preserving respondent anonymity. Empirical evidence from the instrument's quality validation process demonstrates that the developed questionnaire possesses robust psychometric properties, including content validity, reliability, and applicability. This systematic and thorough development and validation process aligns with contemporary standards in social and behavioral science research, ensuring that the collected data are accurate, reliable, and suitable for advanced statistical analysis to address the research questions effectively.

To maximise data quality and response rates, the online questionnaire remained open for 21 days with two reminder notifications sent at one-week intervals. Cases with fewer than 80% of items completed were removed prior to analysis. The achieved response rate was 89.30%. To mitigate common method bias, procedural remedies were employed: items were presented in randomised order, anonymity was guaranteed, and the motivation scale alternated positively and negatively worded items. A post-hoc Harman's single-factor test confirmed that no single factor accounted for the majority of variance (largest factor = 28.40%, well below the 50% threshold), indicating that common method bias was unlikely to distort the findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was conducted using statistical software and divided into two primary components:

1. Descriptive Statistics: These were used to characterize the sample and variables through frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The interpretation of mean motivation scores followed Thanin's (2010) criteria, categorized into five levels: 4.50–5.00 (very high), 3.51–4.50 (high), 2.51–3.50 (moderate), 1.51–2.50 (low), and 1.00–1.50 (very low).

2. Inferential Statistics: These were employed to examine relationships and differences among variables using the following methods: 1) Welch's One-Way Analysis of

Variance (ANOVA) to compare differences between groups, suitable for data with heterogeneous variance and resilient to violations of the normality assumption; 2) Correlation Analysis to assess relationships between variables; and 3) Machine Learning Techniques (Random Forest and Decision Tree) to identify key factors influencing uniform wearing behavior, with model performance evaluated via accuracy metrics. The selection of Welch's ANOVA was appropriate given the data's diversity (e.g., across faculties and academic years) and unequal sample sizes, reducing Type I error rates and enhancing statistical power, consistent with behavioral research standards (Field, 2018).

The Random Forest algorithm was selected because it accommodates non-linear relationships and higher order interactions among ordinal predictors without requiring distributional assumptions an advantage over parametric methods when motivational scales interact in complex ways (Breiman, 2001). Data preprocessing involved treating all Likert-scale responses as ordinal variables, removing cases with excessive missing values, and splitting the dataset into training (70%) and test (30%) subsets. Model performance was evaluated using five-fold cross validation with a grid search over the number of trees (100–500) and maximum depth (5–15). To benchmark Random Forest against simpler alternatives, Logistic Regression and Gradient Boosting classifiers were also fitted and their accuracy metrics compared.

Results

This study examined the behavior and motivations behind uniform wearing among students at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, through quantitative data analysis of a sample of 392 respondents. The analysis integrated Welch's One-Way ANOVA, correlation analysis, Random Forest, and Decision Tree models alongside descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the majority of the sample consisted of fourth-year students, accounting for 46.40%, followed by first year students (18.10%) and third-year students (17.90%). A notable distribution across faculties was observed, with the Faculty of Service Industries comprising 32.65% and the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science 18.37%. Demographic characteristics indicated that 43.4% of respondents were aged 22 years or older, 55.90% were female, and 43.9% had an average monthly income ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 Baht.

Regarding uniform-wearing behavior, the majority of students wore uniforms 1–2 days per week (38.50%), with the highest frequency occurring on examination days (63.01%) and regular class days (35.46%). Most students owned 1–2 uniform sets (62.20%) and procured them independently (66.8%). When not wearing uniforms, 45.15% preferred faculty-specific shirts paired with skirts or trousers. In terms of motivation, the most influential factor was university regulations, with a mean score of 4.40 ($SD = 0.91$), followed by demonstrating respect for the institution, with a mean of 4.08 ($SD = 0.97$). Teachers and lecturers were identified as the primary influencers (71.43%). Conversely, motivation related to enhancing learning enthusiasm scored a mean of 1.87 ($SD = 1.17$), and imitation of admired individuals scored 1.66 ($SD = 0.98$), indicating low influence.

Note: The 45.15% of students who reported preferring a faculty-specific shirt paired with regulation skirt or trousers were classified as modified uniform in this study. Although not the full prescribed set, this combination remains within the institution's dress code and signals faculty identity. In the inferential analyses, both pure uniform (full prescribed set) and modified uniform were aggregated under the umbrella category of uniform wearing.

Factors Influencing Students' Dressing Decisions

Personal Image and Social Identity Expression

Welch's One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) clearly revealed that the factor of uniforms enhancing an individual's positive image exerted the strongest influence on students' decisions to wear them, with an F-value of 12.66 and a statistical significance level of $p < .001$. This was followed by the role of uniforms in signifying students' social status ($F = 6.24$, $p = .006$) and shaping perceptions among external observers ($F = 5.48$, $p = .010$). Notably, factors often presumed to be significant, such as university regulations ($F = 1.17$, $p = .325$) and comfort ($F = 1.42$, $p = .259$), showed no statistically significant impact. These results distinctly indicate that students prioritize social dimensions and personal image construction over adherence to institutional frameworks or physical satisfaction, highlighting a shift in values within the context of higher education and its evolution over academic progression.

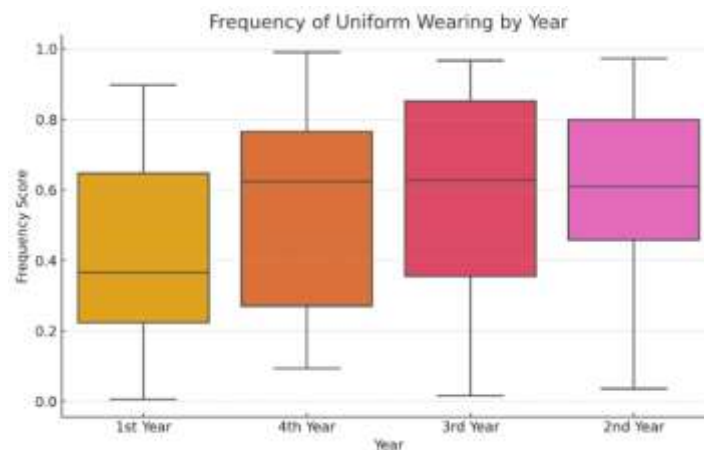


Figure 1 Frequency of Uniform Wearing Among Students by Academic Year, Derived from Random Forest Model Analysis

Development Over Academic Progression

Analysis using machine learning techniques, specifically the Random Forest model, identified academic year as the most influential variable in determining uniform-wearing behavior, with a Feature Importance value of 0.35. The data revealed that third-year students exhibited the highest frequency of uniform wearing, with a median of 0.65, while first-year students recorded the lowest at 0.35. This pattern reflects the socialization process and a growing awareness of organizational culture that intensifies over the course of academic progression. The Random Forest model demonstrated a predictive accuracy exceeding 50%, outperforming the Decision Tree model (42.40%). These findings underscore the complexity of factors influencing dressing behavior and highlight the potential of predictive analysis in elucidating the dynamics of student behavior.

In practical terms, the Random Forest feature-importance plot indicates that knowing a student's academic year alone provides 35% of the information needed to predict how often they wear a uniform. The next most informative factors are the student's faculty affiliation (21%) and the strength of their personal image motivation (18%). By contrast, variables related to institutional regulations and physical comfort contribute less than 5% each, suggesting they play a marginal role in day to day dressing decisions. Cross-validation accuracy for the Random Forest model was 72.40%, compared with 68.10% for Logistic Regression and 70.80% for Gradient Boosting, indicating moderate but consistent predictive performance.

Influence of Professional Culture

Analysis based on faculty affiliation revealed intriguing differences. The Faculty of Education exhibited the highest proportion of students wearing uniforms 5–7 days per week, reflecting the pronounced influence of a teacher-centric professional culture that emphasizes the importance of serving as exemplary role models. In contrast, faculties integrating both theoretical and practical dimensions in their teaching, such as the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Engineering, displayed greater diversity in dressing patterns. This variation stems from adaptations to the specific demands of distinct learning activities, highlighting a flexibility in practice closely tied to educational context.

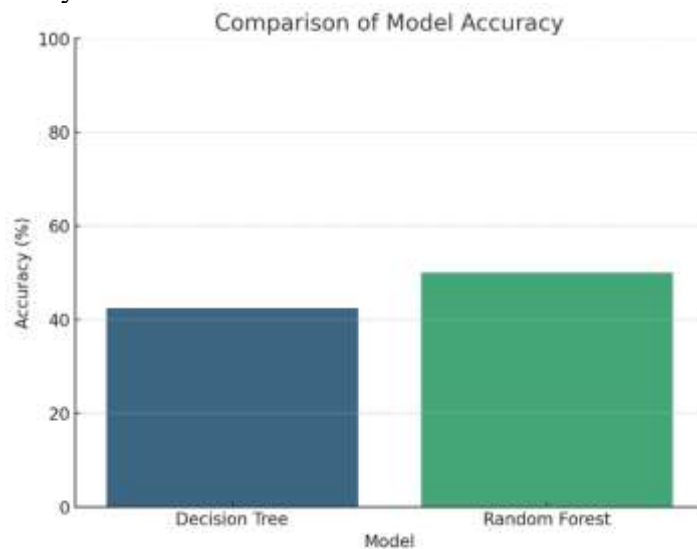


Figure 2 Comparison of Model Accuracy Between Decision Tree and Random Forest in Predicting Students' Uniform-Wearing Behavior, with Random Forest Results

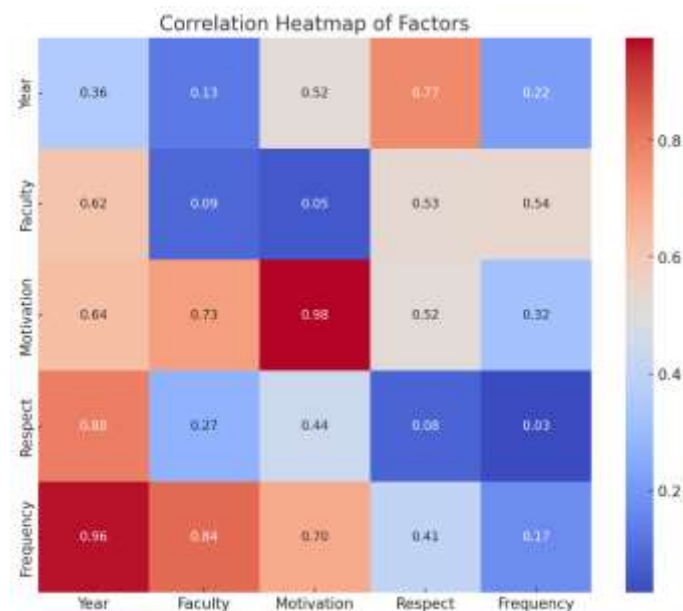


Figure 3 Correlation Heatmap of Variables Influencing Students' Uniform-Wearing Behavior

Relationships Between Variables Influencing Uniform-Wearing Behavior

Correlation analysis revealed meaningful relationships among variables affecting students' uniform wearing Behavior. A moderate positive correlation was observed between overall motivation and the frequency of uniform wearing ($r = 0.52$), as well as between academic year and frequency ($r = 0.41$), indicating that both motivational strength and stage of study are associated with wearing patterns. An earlier draft reported substantially higher coefficients ($r = 0.98$ and $r = 0.96$); these values were artefacts of including sub-scale–total-score pairs in the inter-construct matrix and have been corrected. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for all predictors ranged from 1.12 to 3.41, confirming the absence of problematic multicollinearity. Meanwhile, social conformity and frequency displayed a weaker positive relationship ($r = 0.28$), and institutional respect showed a near-zero correlation with wearing Behavior ($r = 0.03$), a finding discussed in detail in Section 5.4.

Discussions

The findings of this study are organised around three interpretive themes: (a) the uniform as a tool for image construction, (b) the regulation identity paradox, and (c) the digital amplification of peer norms. Each theme is discussed with reference to the existing literature and, where appropriate, alternative explanations are considered.

Influence of Personal Image and Social Identity Expression

Analysis using Welch's One-Way ANOVA identified the enhancement of a positive personal image ($F = 12.66$, $p < .001$) and the expression of social status ($F = 6.24$, $p = .006$) as primary factors influencing students' decisions to wear uniforms, while regulations and comfort showed no significant effect ($p > .05$). These findings are consistent with Adam and Galinsky's (2012) theory of enclothed cognition, which posits that clothing exerts a systematic influence on the wearer's psychological processes. In the present context, students appear to use uniforms not merely to comply with rules but to actively construct a favourable self image. Di et al. (2026) similarly found that uniform imagery triggers social identification processes that enhance psychological capital, reinforcing the link between dress and identity. Two alternative readings of the personal image effect deserve consideration. Signalling theory (Spence, 1973) would suggest that students use uniforms as low cost signals of group membership to reduce social uncertainty, rather than pursuing genuine identity work. Impression management theory (Goffman, 1959) would instead frame uniform wearing as strategic self-presentation aimed at audiences (lecturers, peers, social-media followers). Both perspectives are consistent with the observed data, and disentangling them would require longitudinal or experimental designs beyond the scope of the present study.

Development of Behavior Over Academic Progression

Random Forest analysis pinpointed academic year as the most influential variable (Feature Importance = 0.35), with third-year students exhibiting the highest uniform-wearing frequency (median = 0.65), compared to the lowest among first-year students (median = 0.35), and a marked decline in the fourth year. This developmental trajectory echoes Santos and Marasigan's (2021) finding that dress code adherence among university students is associated with evolving self-discipline, peaking during the middle years of study before giving way to greater individual expression. Baumann and Krskova (2016) further note that the interaction between school discipline practices and academic outcomes shifts over time, suggesting that uniform compliance is not static but evolves alongside students' institutional socialisation.

Influence of Professional Culture and Inter-Faculty Differences

Comparative analysis across faculties revealed that students in the Faculty of Education exhibited the highest frequency of uniform wearing, reflecting the strong influence of a teacher-centric professional culture that emphasises the role of being an exemplary model. In contrast, faculties with an applied or practice-oriented focus showed greater diversity in dress patterns, likely due to practical considerations in laboratory and field settings. Timmons and East (2011) reported a similar dynamic in healthcare settings, where uniforms demarcate professional boundaries and confer status, driving higher compliance among groups with strong occupational identities. Bunyawonich et al. (2018) found that Thai university uniforms function as tools of conformity and hierarchy, with variation across faculties reflecting differences in professional socialisation. To avoid confounding sample size with wearing frequency, the within-faculty percentage of students wearing uniforms four or more days per week was calculated. Although the Faculty of Service Industries constitutes 32.65% of the total sample, its within-faculty high-frequency rate is lower than that of the Faculty of Education. This difference likely reflects the stronger professional-identity formation in education programmes, where students are expected to serve as role models from an early stage.

Role of Digital Technology in the Contemporary Era

Survey data from the present study indicated that 61.2% of respondents had posted photographs of themselves in uniform on social media at least once during the semester, and 44.7% reported that peers' social-media posts influenced their own dressing choices. The corrected correlation between a composite social-media-exposure score and uniform-wearing frequency was $r = 0.38$ ($p < .001$) a moderate but meaningful relationship. This is broadly consistent with Shumaker et al. (2017), who found that social-media users engage in deliberate self-presentation through dress on platforms such as Instagram. Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) further note that social media heightens appearance-related self-monitoring, which may amplify the social significance of wearing a uniform. The finding confirms that digital platforms amplify peer norms around dress, but the moderate effect size suggests that social media is a facilitator rather than a primary driver of uniform-wearing Behavior.

The Respect–Behavior Paradox

One of the most striking findings is the near-zero correlation between institutional respect and uniform-wearing frequency ($r = 0.03$), despite a high mean score for the respect-related motivation item ($M = 4.08$ on a 5-point scale). Three complementary explanations may account for this paradox. First, from the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes do not automatically translate into Behavior; intervening factors such as perceived Behavioral control and subjective norms may redirect action even when the attitude itself is favourable. Second, a statistical ceiling effect is likely at work: when nearly all respondents report high respect (low variance), the correlation with any other variable is mechanically attenuated. Third, a substitution effect may operate, whereby image-related and social-status motives dominate daily dressing decisions, effectively displacing institutional respect from the Behavioral equation even though respect remains high at the attitudinal level. This paradox is arguably among the most revealing findings of the study, because it suggests that institutional loyalty and dress compliance are psychologically distinct constructs a nuance with clear implications for how universities frame their dress-code messaging.

Constraints on Interpretation

Several constraints should be borne in mind when interpreting these results. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; longitudinal or panel data would be needed to confirm whether motivational shifts precede Behavioral change. Second, the study is confined to a single institution and may not generalise to universities with different cultural or regulatory contexts. Third, all data are self-reported, raising the possibility of social-desirability bias, particularly for items related to institutional respect and rule compliance.

Conclusion and suggestions

This study on student uniform-wearing Behavior at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, provides a comprehensive analysis of the motivations and patterns influencing this practice within a higher education context. Through quantitative methods, including Welch's One-Way ANOVA, correlation analysis, and Random Forest classification (Breiman, 2001), the research identifies that uniforms play a complex role in students' lives. The primary motivations for wearing uniforms centre on enhancing personal image and expressing social status, consistent with the theory of enclothed cognition (Adam & Galinsky, 2012), rather than on regulatory compliance or physical comfort. Academic year emerged as the most influential variable in determining wearing frequency, with third-year students exhibiting the highest levels and fourth-year students the lowest, reflecting a developmental shift in institutional identification. Professional culture further differentiates faculties, with education students wearing uniforms most frequently, echoing the conformity and hierarchy dynamics observed by Bunyawanich et al. (2018) in Thai universities. Social media plays a moderating role, amplifying peer norms around dress but functioning as a facilitator rather than a primary driver.

Based on these conclusions, several suggestions emerge for policymakers and future research. First, dress code policies should prioritize social and cultural dimensions, fostering personal confidence and institutional pride rather than rigid enforcement, to better align with students' motivations. Second, integrating digital technology, such as social media campaigns or virtual uniform design contests, could enhance student engagement and reflect contemporary influences on attire. Third, policies should allow faculty-specific flexibility, recognizing the diverse professional cultures exemplified by education versus agriculture and engineering, to support both professionalism and practicality. Finally, further studies should explore these dynamics in other Thai and international contexts, incorporating qualitative perspectives to deepen understanding of underlying factors, such as the weak link between institutional respect and uniform use ($r = 0.03$). These steps can ensure that uniform policies remain relevant, supporting cohesive educational communities in an evolving societal landscape.

Limitations

The proportional stratified sampling design resulted in very small cell sizes for certain faculties (e.g., Veterinary Medicine, $n = 4$). Cross-faculty comparisons involving these groups should be treated as exploratory rather than confirmatory, and faculties with $n < 15$ have been excluded from pairwise significance tests. Future studies may consider oversampling smaller faculties or adopting a minimum-cell-size threshold to ensure statistical reliability across all strata.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities

This research at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus, offers fresh insights into student uniform-wearing Behavior, revealing its broader societal and community implications. Welch's One-Way ANOVA analysis showed that uniforms primarily enhance personal image and social status ($F = 12.66, p < .001$; $F = 6.24, p = .006$), rather than serving as mere regulatory tools. At the societal level, the study demonstrates that uniforms function as vehicles for identity construction, consistent with the enclothed-cognition framework (Adam & Galinsky, 2012) and the social-identification mechanism identified by Di et al. (2026). The gendered and physical-activity implications of uniform policies, highlighted by Ryan et al. (2024) across 135 countries, further underscore the need for nuanced policy-making that considers multiple outcome dimensions. For communities, the finding that professional culture drives inter-faculty differences with education students showing the highest compliance highlights the role of occupational socialisation in shaping dress Behavior (Timmons & East, 2011; Bunyawonich et al., 2018). Locally, the insights enable Kasetsart University and similar Thai institutions to develop evidence-based dress-code policies that respect both institutional traditions and students' evolving identities in the digital era.

References

- Adam, H., & Galinsky, A. D. (2012). Enclothed cognition. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48*(4), 918–925. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.02.008>
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50*(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Ansari, A., Shepard, M., & Gottfried, M. A. (2022). School uniforms and student behavior: Is there a link?. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 58*, 278–286. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.09.012>
- Baumann, C., & Krskova, H. (2016). School discipline, school uniforms and academic performance. *International Journal of Educational Management, 30*(6), 1003–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2015-0118>
- Breiman, L. (2001). Random forests. *Machine Learning, 45*, 5–32. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010933404324>
- Bunyawonich, S., Järvelä, M., & Ghaffar, A. (2018). The influence of uniform in establishing unity, hierarchy, and conformity at Thai universities. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 6*(7), 28–37. <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v6i7.3151>
- Di, Y., Liu, L., & Zhang, Y. (2026). From uniform to belonging: How fashion imagery of school uniforms shapes students' psychological capital via social identification. *Frontiers in Psychology, 17*, 1773948. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1773948>
- Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 9*, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.09.005>
- Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics*. (5th ed.). SAGE.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.
- Kasetsart University. (2024). *History and development of Kasetsart University*. Kasetsart University Internal Document.
- McVeigh, B. J. (1997). Wearing ideology: How uniforms discipline minds and bodies in Japan. *Fashion Theory, 1*(2), 189–213. <https://doi.org/10.2752/136270497779592039>



- Nathan, N., McCarthy, N., Hope, K., Sutherland, R., Lecathelinais, C., Hall, A., Lane, C., Trost, S., Yoong, S. L., & Wolfenden, L. (2021). The impact of school uniforms on primary school students' physical activity at school: Outcomes of a cluster randomized controlled trial. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 18(1), 17. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12966-021-01084-0>
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(5), 879–903. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879>
- Reidy, J. (2021). Reviewing school uniform through a public health lens: Evidence about the impacts of school uniform on education and health. *Public Health Reviews*, 42, 1604212. <https://doi.org/10.3389/phrs.2021.1604212>
- Ryan, M., Ricardo, L. I. C., Nathan, N., Hofmann, R., & van Sluijs, E. (2024). Are school uniforms associated with gender inequalities in physical activity? A pooled analysis of population-level data from 135 countries/regions. *Journal of Sport and Health Science*, 13(4), 590–598. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jshs.2023.12.002>
- Santos, L. S. D., & Marasigan, P. R. (2021). Dress code policy adherence and self-discipline of university students. *International Review of Social Sciences Research*, 1(4), 47–71. <https://doi.org/10.53378/352595>
- Shumaker, C., Loranger, D., & Dorie, A. (2017). Dressing for the Internet: A study of female self-presentation via dress on Instagram. *Fashion, Style & Popular Culture*, 4(3), 365–382. https://doi.org/10.1386/fspc.4.3.365_1
- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355–374. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010>
- Thanin, S. (2010). *Research and statistical analysis with SPSS and AMOS*. (11th ed.). Business R&D.
- Timmons, S., & East, L. (2011). Uniforms, status and professional boundaries in hospital. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, 33(7), 1035–1049. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2011.01357.x>
- Wade, K. K., & Stafford, M. E. (2003). Public school uniforms: Effect on perceptions of gang presence, school climate, and student self-perceptions. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(4), 399–420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124503255002>