

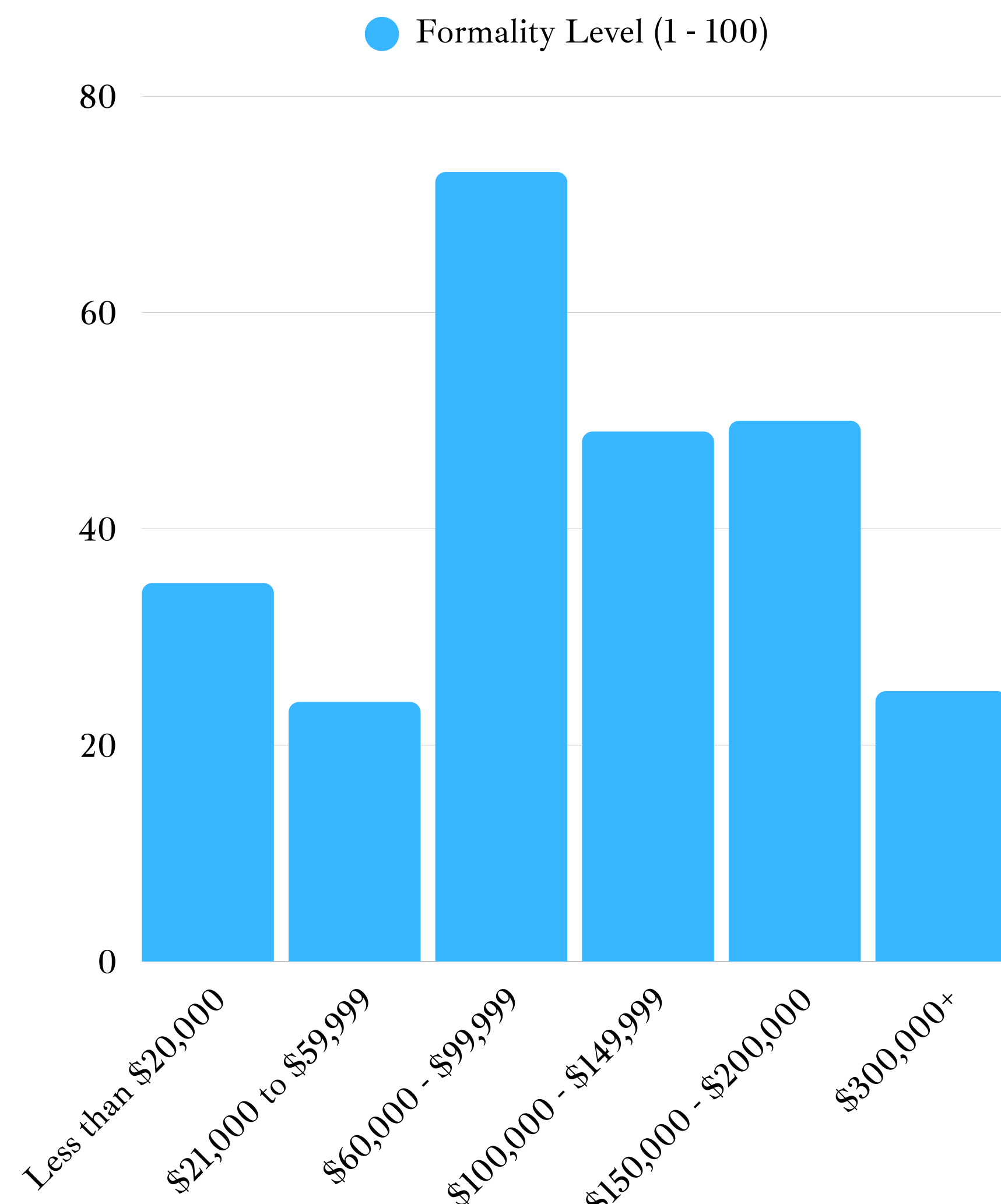
Abstract

This research explores how American Generation Z workers navigate and perform social class through their appearance, behavior, and communication style, with a particular focus on the high-pressure fashion industry. Using in-depth ethnographic interviews with 20 employees across diverse industries and age groups, including ethnographic interviews with 3 Gen Z fashion workers, the study investigates class performance as both a survival strategy in an increasingly unequal labor market and a means of self-expression in the digital age.

Key findings reveal a complex tapestry of class signaling strategies, from the subtle art of "dressing for success" to the deliberate adoption of linguistic codes. Notably, Gen Z employees display a unique fluency in digital class markers, leveraging social media savvy and tech literacy as modern forms of cultural capital. The study uncovers an intriguing "class cosplay" phenomenon, where workers temporarily embody different social strata to navigate professional landscapes.

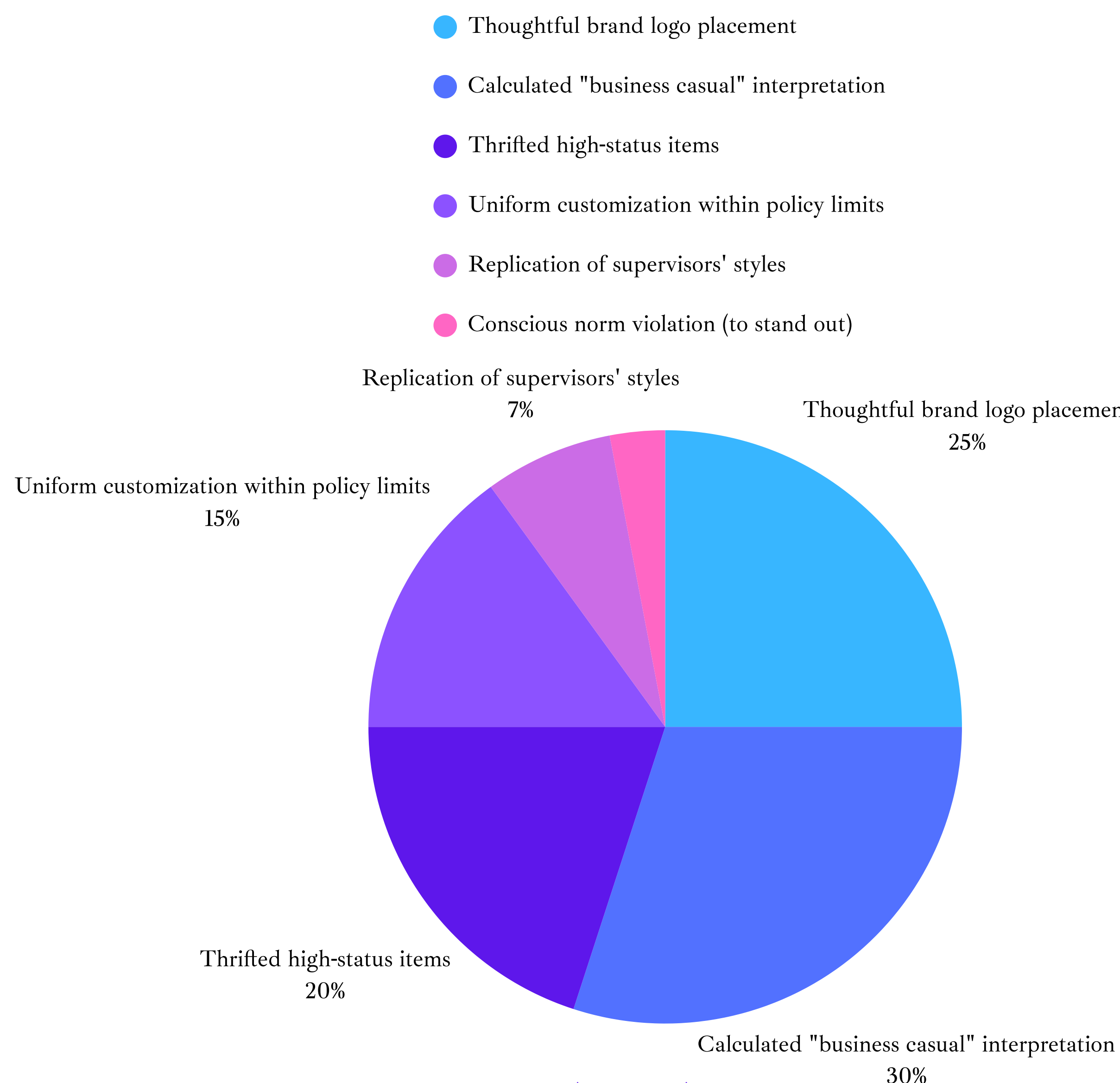
This research contributes to the evolving discourse on social class and work by highlighting the intersection of traditional and emerging class signifiers in the digital era. It explores how the democratization of luxury through fast fashion and social media has both blurred and reinforced class boundaries, creating a new battlefield of authenticity versus imitation.

The study's implications extend beyond the fashion sector, offering critical insights into broader questions of social mobility, the performative nature of professionalism, and the role of technology in reshaping class dynamics in the 21st-century workplace. By examining these issues through the lens of Generation Z, this research provides a timely and crucial perspective on the future of work and social stratification.



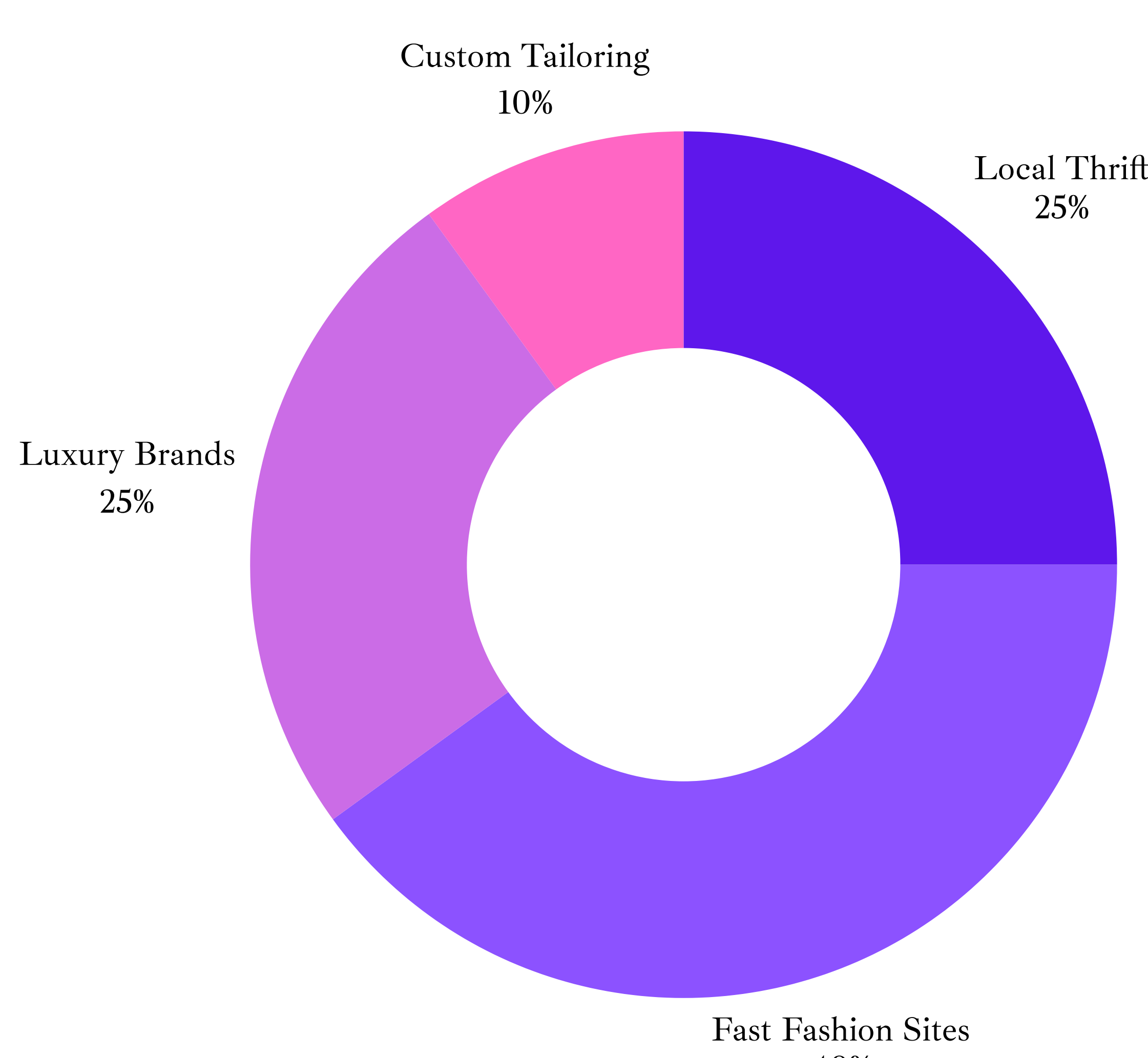
Income vs. Work Environment Formality (Bar Chart)

The bar chart illustrates the relationship between income levels and workplace formality, with formality scores ranging from 0 (informal) to 100 (very formal). Respondents earning \$60,000–\$99,999 reported the highest formality level (73), while those earning less than \$20,000 or more than \$300,000 reported lower formality levels. This trend suggests that mid-range income earners may experience more structured or formal work environments compared to lower or higher-income groups.



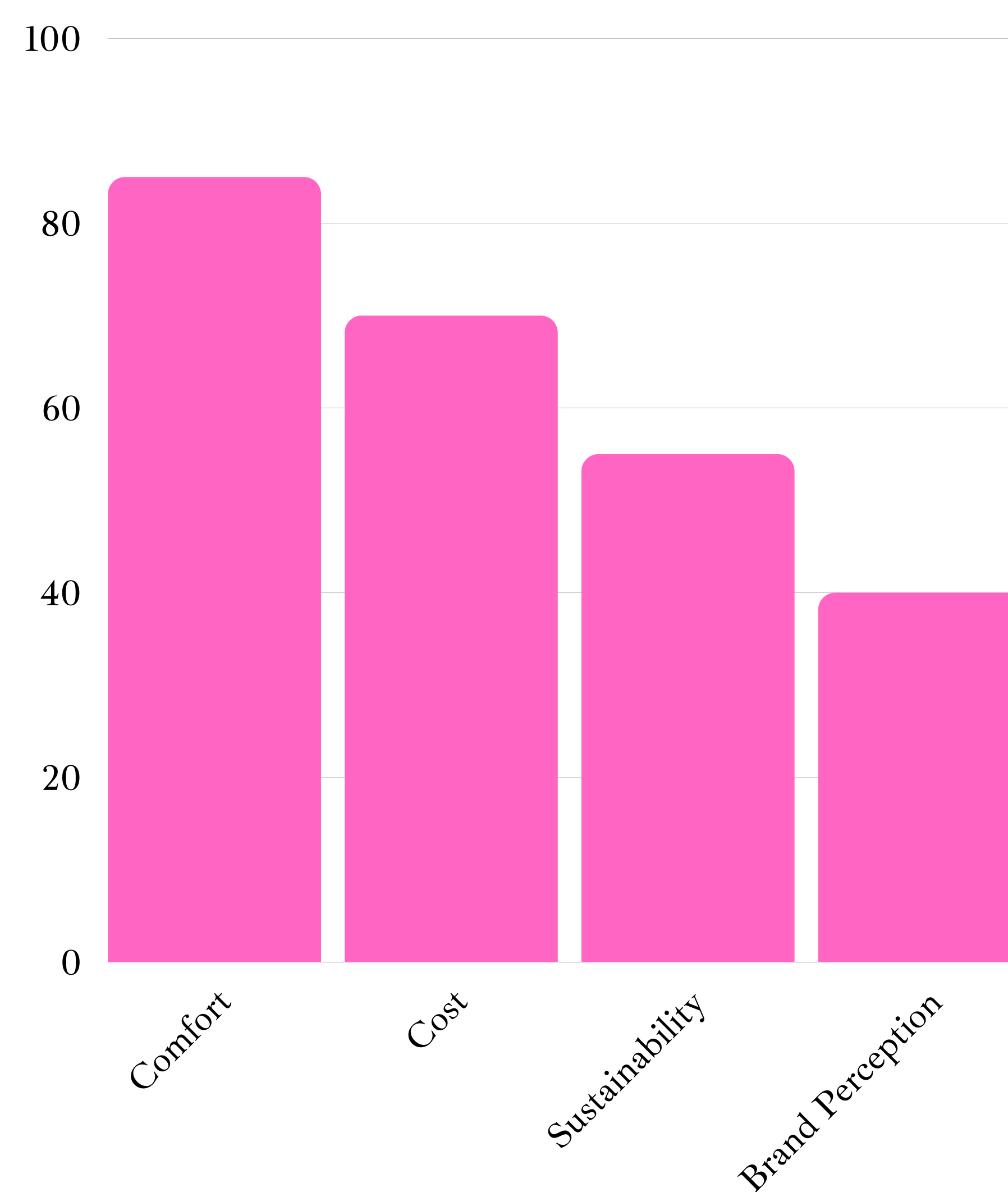
3. Strategies for Managing Professional Perception (Pie Chart)

This bar chart ranks strategies used to manage professional perception based on frequency of use. "Calculated 'business casual' interpretation" is the most frequently employed strategy at 30%, followed by "Thoughtful brand logo placement" at 25%. Less commonly used strategies include "Replication of supervisors' styles" and "Conscious norm violation," indicating that respondents tend to prioritize subtle and widely accepted methods over bold or unconventional approaches.



Shopping Preferences for Work Clothes (Donut Chart)

The pie chart breaks down respondents' shopping preferences for work attire, highlighting fast fashion sites as the most popular choice at 40%. Local thrift stores and luxury brands each account for 25% of preferences, while custom tailoring is the least favored option at 10%. These results suggest a diverse range of shopping habits influenced by factors such as cost and accessibility.



Factors Influencing Work Attire Purchases (Bar Chart)

The bar chart compares the importance of four factors—in work attire purchasing decisions. Comfort is ranked as the most impactful factor, with a score of 85, followed by Cost at 70. Sustainability and Brand Perception are less influential, with scores of 55 and 40 respectively, indicating that practicality and affordability outweigh ethical considerations and brand image for most respondents.

Key Findings

Income and Work Environment Formality:

There appears to be a correlation between higher income levels and more formal work environments. Respondents with higher annual household incomes (e.g., "\$100,000 - \$149,999" and "\$150,000 - \$200,000") tend to report more formal work environments, with formality scores ranging from 50 to 81 on a scale where 100 is very formal.

Age and Fashion Expenditure:

Younger respondents (18-22 and 23-30 age groups) generally report spending a smaller percentage of their income on work clothing compared to older respondents. This suggests that age may influence fashion spending habits in professional settings.

Gender and Clothing Pressure:

Female respondents were more likely to report feeling pressured to dress a certain way beyond workplace requirements. This indicates a potential gender disparity in perceived clothing expectations in professional environments.

Income and Shopping Preferences:

Higher-income respondents tend to prioritize shopping at luxury brands and custom tailoring, while lower-income respondents favor fast fashion and thrift stores. This suggests a correlation between income levels and clothing purchase decisions.

Work Environment and Clothing Strategies:

Respondents in more formal work environments (higher formality scores) tend to employ more conscious strategies to manage how they are perceived, such as thoughtful brand logo placement and calculated "business casual" interpretation. This indicates a correlation between workplace formality and intentional fashion choices.