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**BREAKING DOWN THE BLUSH: UNVEILING THE COSTLY
REALITY OF THE 'PINK TAX'**- Mehar Kaur¹**Abstract**

Gender discrimination is common in modern society, with examples including the gender wage gap, inheritance laws, and access to education. The "pink tax," or the higher price female customers pay for precisely similar items and services, is a less well-known type of gender discrimination. Companies have employed gendered marketing to increase profits without informing customers about this discriminatory behaviour. Some companies have actively developed gender-neutral pricing strategies and informed customers about the pink charge. Dropping the pink tax is a step towards achieving gender parity, the United Nations' fifth Sustainable Development Goals. This article delves into the "Pink tax" analysis and its presence in various industries by analysing studies showing female consumers' take on the Pink tax. It also talks about the position of the pink tax in India and how social media plays a vital role in raising awareness about it. It is concluded that a fairer marketplace that enhances women's financial empowerment and advances gender equality should be created.

Keywords: Pink tax, Gender discrimination, female consumers.**Introduction**

Gender bias shows up in many areas of life, like lower wages for women, unfair inheritance rights, and unequal chances to get an education. One

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hidden form of this discrimination is the "pink tax," where women often pay more for things that are practically the same as what men buy. The idea of a "pink tax" started after World War II, when the colour pink became linked to being feminine. This connection between pink and girls came about because of a few things like propaganda pushing women back into housework after the war and clothing companies trying to make more money by creating clothes and colours specifically for boys or girls.

Decoding the Drivers of the “Pink Tax”

Companies might try to justify the pink tax by pointing to the differences in women's clothes and toiletries. They say women's items are more complex, with fancy designs, many different sizes, and a mix of materials. This, they argue, requires skilled workers, better quality materials, and more fabric wasted during cutting. But there's another side to the story. Companies know women are willing to pay more for things they see as high quality, attractive, and convenient. So, they charge more for women's products even if the costs aren't much higher. This way, they make the most profit. Ideally, companies should be more ethical and charge pretty, but often, making money comes first. The pressure to be fair isn't always strong enough to overcome the desire for more significant profits. This price difference between men's and women's things can worsen when countries charge higher taxes on the materials used to make women's clothes. These extra costs get passed on to consumers, making the pink tax even more of a problem.

Pink Tax Presence Across Industries

Haircuts for women often cost more than men's, even for similar styles. Salons might charge Rs. 400 for a women's cut, while a nearly identical

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men's cut costs Rs. 200. This pattern reflects a "pink tax" on women's services despite comparable effort.

Similarly, razors marketed towards women are priced higher than men's, despite minimal variations like colour. A basic five-pack of pink women's razors might be Rs. 350, compared to Rs. 200 for a blue men's pack. Pricing hinges on target demographics, not product differences.

Gender bias in pricing isn't limited to adults. Toys and accessories for girls are frequently more expensive than for boys, even when the only difference is colour. A gender-neutral toy painted pink might cost more than the same toy in another colour. This practice unfairly inflates the cost of products marketed towards girls.

Moisturisers targeted at women often come with significantly higher price tags than similar products for men. This price difference can't be justified by the ingredients or effectiveness, which are usually very similar. Instead, it's likely a result of marketing strategies that exploit how consumers typically perceive products for women.

In conclusion, women pay more for similar goods and services simply because they are marketed towards them. This practice represents a form of gender-based economic discrimination that hurts women's financial well-being.

Female Consumers' Take on the Pink Tax

The survey revealed widespread awareness of gender-based price discrimination: 72.6% of respondents believe it exists, and 61.1% recognise it as the "Pink Tax." Interestingly, a majority (63.7%) are students financially dependent on their parents. While 26.5% hold full-time jobs, 13.3% work

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part-time, and a small portion (2.7%) are in business. The most common Pink Tax encounters involve skincare (59.3%), health and hygiene products (54.9%), and hair salon services (56.7%). Interestingly, both gender discrimination and product differences are perceived as reasons behind the Pink Tax. Despite the Pink Tax, most respondents (82%) prioritise practicality over aesthetics. However, cost savings incentivise some to purchase men's products: 6.2% frequently and 39.8% occasionally. Notably, nearly 40% (39.8%) are

likely to switch to men's products offering equal effectiveness, suggesting a potential market for unisex options. This is further supported by over half (54%) of female respondents being willing to find cheaper men's alternatives.

However, the impact of the Pink Tax varies. While 46.9% feel it only affects their savings occasionally, rarely, or not at all, over half (68.1%) recognise its broader economic impact. Only 6.2% see no economic consequence. Some respondents even believe there are additional, non-monetary effects.

While uncertainty exists about eliminating the Pink Tax (44.2% are unsure), the survey highlights strong support for addressing it through policy changes, regulations, and raising awareness. **The gender pay gap, coupled with the "pink tax" on products and services marketed towards women in India, creates a double burden. Women earn less than men and pay more for essential items. This significantly limits their purchasing power and financial security. Furthermore, the inflated prices of these products can perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards. The pressure to conform to these standards can negatively impact women's self-esteem and force them to prioritise aesthetics over affordability.**

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India's Pink Tax Struggle

Thanks to relentless advocacy by activists, the central government eliminated the 12 per cent GST on menstrual sanitary products in 2018. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reveals that women often earn less than men for identical work. In India, the average wage gap is 19 per cent across all sectors, with the disparity even more pronounced in agriculture, where women do 80 per cent of the work. Globally, women of colour face even steeper hurdles, with Black women earning just 64 cents and Hispanic women only 56 cents for every dollar a white man makes. In retirement, women receive only 70 per cent of the income that men do. The gender gap is also stark in leadership roles, where male dominance is pervasive. A 2021 survey found that women held only 10 per cent of management positions and made up just 5 per cent of CEOs in India.

In contrast, contraceptives, deemed essential, are tax-exempt, highlighting the absurdity of taxing sanitary products as luxuries under the "tampon tax." The issue gained significant traction on social media, amassing over 400,000 signatures on petitions from activists, celebrities, politicians, and performers.

Conclusion

The Pink Tax is one of the most common forms of gender-based discrimination, which affects women economically in various fields. It shows up through higher prices on women's personal care products and clothes, and even haircuts, making it worse for women facing financial difficulties. The effort towards addressing this issue needs to go beyond just creating consumer awareness. It needs to encompass different policy changes, regulatory action points, and public campaigns; these can make an impact, as seen through activist initiatives like removing GST on menstrual products in India. This should not be seen in isolation because women already face

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significant pay gaps mainly due not only to a gendered but also racialised hierarchy with white males at its apex despite their poor leadership qualities, as evidenced by numerous scandals surrounding them. Through coordinated efforts, including consumer activism and policy initiatives, we can create a fairer marketplace that enhances women's financial empowerment and advances gender equality.

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