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# Pink Tax: A Gender-Based Price Discrimination

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## ABSTRACT

*Pink Tax is a price discriminatory tax that is "gender-based". This tax imposes an unreasonable tax on women, while men are free from any such type of hidden tax specifically imposed for the products specially marketed towards them. Pink Tax is the result of gender socialization and is viewed as detrimental to women. This tax creates unnecessary discrimination based on gender in the 21st century and, hence, is bad for society's development. Pink Tax is one of the least talked about topics and, hence, is in dire need of more research and publications.*

**Keywords:** Pink Tax, Gender-based price discrimination, Gender socializing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

PINK TAX is a gender-based, price-discriminatory tax levied explicitly on women centric or specific products. The term pink in here has its roots in aeons of prejudice that products made for women are PINK in colour or that women are supposed to like the colour pink. To summarise, the word PINK depicts Women in the eyes of this world. In simpler terms, Pink Tax is the extra charge imposed exclusively on women for products specifically marketed to them. This tax requires women to pay additional hidden charges when purchasing the same products as men because they are pink in colour or are specifically designed for their use, and is thus referred to as a "gender-based price discriminatory tax."

Pink Tax manifests itself in two ways. First, certain products or services bear an additional tax on their price. Second, which is not literally a tax, firms sell products marketed to women at a higher price than they sell (nearly identical) products marketed to men. In this second case, firms are not charging higher prices on female products out of malice but are following a profit-maximizing strategy that capitalizes on market trends, preferences, shopping behaviour, and psychology.<sup>2</sup>

A study by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs titled From Cradle to Cane (2015) anticipated that commodities that perform the same function for both genders cost

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<sup>2</sup> Habbal, Hajar L., "An Economic Analysis of The Pink Tax" (2020)

7% more than the average for women.<sup>3</sup> The study also enumerated that this price discrepancy included products from different niches like toys, clothing, apparel, personal hygiene products, etc. The most common among these products were personal hygiene products, where women's products cost 13 percent more than men's.<sup>4</sup>

In India, it all started in 2017, when 12–14% GST was levied on female hygiene products such as sanitary napkins and tampons, while male contraceptives were tax-free as they were considered necessary, whereas tampons were considered a luxury. However, later on, after huge protests for the same, the tax on tampons was waived off.

Some examples where Pink Tax is imposed are: a women's razor is priced at Rs. 97 while a so-called men's razor that does exactly the same job as that women's is priced at a lower rate of Rs. 50; similarly, apparel, salon services, etc. are priced higher than those of men.

## II. IS THIS TAX DISCRIMINATORY?

Pink Tax is based on the stereotypical practice of 'gender socialization'.

According to UNICEF, Gender socialization is defined as a process whereby individuals develop, refine, and learn to 'do' gender through internalizing gender norms and roles as they interact with key agents of socialization, such as their family, social networks, and other social institutions.<sup>5</sup>

In simpler terms, gender socializing is a process by which men and women are taught by society how they should act, behave, have preferences for a certain kind of product, their favourite colours, their likes and dislikes, etc. The concept of gender socialization is based on the simple belief that people are supposed to act, behave, or have preferences according to their biological sex. In our society, a girl is supposed to like the colour pink, and blue is preferred for boys; this is nothing but gender socialization.

UNICEF, in its report, has mentioned that gender socialization occurs at the individual level as well, and this embeds women and men with different attitudes, beliefs, skills, and behaviours in accordance with their genders. These differences created through 'gender socialization' have created a rampant and unseen bias among the genders, with an expectation to behave in a certain way according to their gender. These differences have taken the form of the "pink tax"

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Study-of-Gender-Pricing-in-NYC>.

<sup>4</sup> *What is pink tax, is it unfair for women in India?* (2023) <https://www.outlookindia.com/>. Available at: <https://www.outlookindia.com/business/what-is-pink-tax-is-it-unfair-for-women-in-india--news-268718> (Accessed: 08 June 2023).

<sup>5</sup> John, Neetu A.; Stoebenau, Kirsten; Ritter, Samantha; Edmeades, Jeffrey; Balvin, Nikola (2017). *Gender Socialization during Adolescence in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Conceptualization, influences and outcomes*, *Innocenti Discussion Papers*, no. IDP\_2017\_01, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence

in the present-day scenario.

This practice of gender socializing has resulted in the discriminatory tax named Pink Tax.

### III. GENDER BASED PRICE DISCRIMINATION

Price discrimination is defined as a situation when identical or nearly identical goods and services are priced differently for different sets of consumers, not taking into account the costs incurred in transportation and production. An example of price discrimination in India is the different charges for children and adults at heritage sites, coupons, etc.

When this price discrimination is gender-oriented, it is termed "gender-based price discrimination. Pink Tax is an example of the same.

Women are made to pay extra for the same quality of products as men, despite the well acknowledged fact that women around the globe are remunerated less than men. This in itself shows that there is discrimination against women regarding this matter. As per the Global Gender Gap Report 2022, there is a 19% pay gap between women's and men's salaries in India for the same amount of work or responsibility, especially in the agricultural sector, where women undertake 80% of the work.<sup>6</sup>

This tax is, however, not imposed by the government but by private businesses. Hence it can not be said as an unjust practice by the government, but the private businesses are more-so responsible for fostering such a gender discriminatory tax around the globe. Hence, in order to put a stoppage on this discriminatory tax putting pressure on the private entities by changing our buying preferences would be very beneficial.

Pink Tax is discriminatory in nature as it demands women be a certain way, use certain kinds of products, and above all, pay extra for those products. In our society, women are supposed to look good, dress well, and maintain their personal hygiene to the utmost. Women tend to accord with all these so-called 'mandatory requisites' of society and hence are forced indirectly to buy these expensive products with hidden charges known as Pink Tax.

Paying extra for a so-called women's razor that does the job exactly the same as that of a men's razor or for a perfume just because it is for women is no less than an unreasonable bias. This bias is not limited to just these products but to personal apparel, salon services, and baby feeding bottles as well. Imposing such a tax on baby feeding bottles by making them pink in colour is such an act of disesteem, as gender socialization from the very onset of one's life will

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<sup>6</sup> *Gender socialization during adolescence in low- and middle-income countries: Conceptualization, influences and outcomes* (no date) UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/885-gender-socialization-during-adolescence-in-low-and-middle-income-countries-conceptualization.html> (Accessed: 08 June 2023).

only perpetuate this bias further.

#### **IV. WAY FORWARD**

Research indicates that only 23% of Indians are aware of the term pink tax and its economic impact.<sup>7</sup> These numbers in itself indicate the illiteracy among Indians regarding the Pink Tax, and when someone does not know about a certain kind of discrimination, how are they supposed to fight against it? Hence, the first and foremost important thing is to educate the people about these hidden charges and about how women are made to pay extra for the same products as men just because those products are specifically pink in colour or are marketed towards them only.

Secondly, the pink tax can be curtailed by changing the mindset of society, the mindset that presumes or believes that a girl is only supposed to like the colour and the colour blue is for boys. This can be achieved by inculcating in our children that all colours are beautiful and can be liked by everyone without any gender-based prejudice.

Another step that can be taken is to buy more gender-neutral products. This will force the producers to make more gender-neutral products, and the pink tax will be waived.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Gender-based price disparities are known as pink taxes. The pink tax has long imposed an economic burden on women—especially since women continue to earn less than men and hence shall be curtailed.<sup>8</sup>

In the closing session of the United Nations Commission (2017)<sup>9</sup>, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women, formally known as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, called on countries to eliminate the pink tax to ensure women have full and equal access to economic participation. Hence, it can be seen that this issue is being discussed in international forums as well, and we will see a difference in the near future. With regards to the prevalence of the Pink Tax in India, fostering information about this tax among the citizens is the need of the hour, and only then will we be able to witness a positive change regarding this situation. To conclude we can say that the Pink Tax is another way

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<sup>7</sup> *Global gender gap report 2022* (no date) *World Economic Forum*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/in-full/1-benchmarking-gender-gaps-2022> (Accessed: 08 June 2023).

<sup>8</sup> *What is the 'pink tax' and how does it hinder women?* (no date) *World Economic Forum*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/07/what-is-the-pink-tax-and-how-does-it-hinder-women/> (Accessed: 08 June 2023).

<sup>9</sup> *Closing session, UN Commission agrees roadmap to Women's Economic Empowerment | UN News* (no date) *United Nations*. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/03/554042> (Accessed: 08 June 2023).

through which discrimination against women is being done and this is the era of combating gender-based discriminatory practices where people around the globe are fighting for women's rights in areas of employment, equal remuneration, and other equal rights as that of men, and hence, a tax such as Pink Tax must also be waived.

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