

Examining the Prevalence and Economic Impact of the Pink Tax in India: Evidence from the Personal Care Sector of the FMCG Industry

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Abstract: The Pink Tax refers to implicit gender-based price discrimination (Fugate, 2010) in which products marketed toward women are priced higher than comparable men's products despite offering similar functionality. While well-documented in Western markets (NYC, 2015), Indian evidence remains limited (Sharma, 2024). This study uses secondary data to examine the Pink Tax within India's personal care segment of the FMCG industry. Prices of 28 matched male–female product pairs—including razors, deodorants, shampoos, moisturizers, and skincare items—were collected from major e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Flipkart, Nykaa, and Big Basket. Findings reveal a substantial **average Pink Tax of 78.23%**, with the highest disparities observed in razors (123.88%), deodorants (107.25%), and moisturizers (97.52%). The results indicate that pricing gaps arise primarily from gendered marketing strategies rather than genuine formulation or manufacturing differences. Low consumer awareness, lack of regulation, and reinforcement of gendered cultural norms further enable such practices (Biswas, P, 2024). The study underscores the need for stronger consumer protection, transparent pricing, and corporate accountability.

Keywords: Pink Tax, FMCG, Gender Based Price Discrimination, Personal Care Products, Consumer Behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

The Pink Tax is a subtle yet persistent form of gender-based price discrimination in consumer markets. It is not a government-imposed tax but a market-driven pricing practice in which women's products cost more than similar men's products, often due to superficial differences such as color, fragrance, or packaging. In India, this issue is especially important due to the country's rapidly growing FMCG industry—valued at over USD 110 billion (IBEF, 2024)—and the strong dominance of personal care products within this market.

India's gender wage gap, estimated between 20–30% (Forum, n.d.), intensifies the impact of such discriminatory pricing. Women earn less yet frequently pay more for basic personal care essentials. E-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Nykaa, and Big Basket have made gender-specific product lines more visible (Nielsen., 2022), highlighting price inconsistencies in razors, deodorants, shampoos, and similar items. Despite this growing visibility, academic research and policy discussions around the Pink Tax in India remain limited (Sharma, 2024) (Geetanjali, 2025). This study addresses the need for systematic investigation into its prevalence and scale within India's personal care sector.

1.1 Background of the study:

The Pink Tax has evolved over decades through historical marketing practices, cultural norms, and consumer segmentation strategies. Gendered marketing became common in the mid-20th century (Fugate, 2010), when firms used color—especially pink—to distinguish female-focused products and encourage separate purchases rather than hand-me-down usage. International attention to the issue surged after campaigns like #Womantax (2014) in France and the 2015 NYC Department of Consumer Affairs report (NYC, 2015), which confirmed widespread gender-based price disparities.

In India, discussions on gendered pricing gained momentum during the 2017 GST debate, particularly the controversy around the taxation of sanitary napkins (Forum, n.d.). Although GST on sanitary products was abolished in 2018, this reform addressed only explicit taxation—not corporate-driven price discrimination such as the Pink Tax. India's personal care industry is highly influenced by branding, advertising, and consumer psychology (FICCI, 2023). Companies increasingly create male and female variants of similar products, resulting in distinct pricing even when the functional composition is nearly identical.

Despite rising consumer awareness movements, empirical research on Pink Tax in India is still scarce. The lack of structured quantitative analysis limits national understanding of how widespread the issue is and restricts meaningful policy action. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing systematic, evidence-based documentation of gendered pricing patterns in India's FMCG personal care segment.

1.2 Historical Context and Indian Scenario:

The Pink Tax originated in the mid-20th century when companies began using gender-specific colors, packaging, and branding—especially the association of pink with femininity—to promote separate purchases for men and women. This strategy discouraged product sharing and expanded market segments. International awareness grew in the 2010s, particularly after France's #Womantax campaign (2014) and the New York City Consumer Affairs report (2015), which confirmed systematic price disparities across categories. In India, the issue gained attention during the 2017 GST debate on sanitary products, but while GST on sanitary napkins was removed in 2018, market-driven gendered pricing practices like the Pink Tax remain unregulated and largely unaddressed.

1.3 Problem Statement:

Indian women consistently pay more than men for similar personal care products because of gender-differentiated pricing practices. Women, who are economically disadvantaged because of income disparities, lower labor force participation, and unequal access to resources, bear an additional financial burden simply because of gendered marketing.

However, the lack of structured quantitative research in the Indian FMCG domain restricts awareness, policy advocacy, and corporate accountability. This paper addresses this urgent need to analyze and document the prevalence of the Pink Tax in Indian consumer markets.

1.4 Significance of the Study:

The study is significant because it:

- Provides quantitative evidence of gender-based economic discrimination.
- Brings attention to everyday issues that remain unnoticed by consumers.
- Encourages companies to adopt gender-neutral pricing strategies.
- Can guide policymakers in developing consumer protection regulations.

1.5 Objectives of study:

1. To explain the conceptual definition, evolution, and relevance of the Pink Tax in global and Indian contexts.
2. To analyze secondary literature related to gender-based pricing discrimination across FMCG categories.
3. To compare prices of gender-segmented personal care products available on Indian e-commerce platforms.

4. To quantify the Pink Tax percentage across identified categories.
5. To understand implications for consumer behavior, industry practices, and policy intervention.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study focuses on identifying and analyzing the Pink Tax within the personal care segment of India's FMCG industry. It examines gender-segregated products—such as razors, shampoos, deodorants, moisturizers, toothbrushes, and body washes—sold to men and women in similar quantities and brands. The research is limited to the Indian online retail market, using secondary data collected from major e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Flipkart, Nykaa, and BigBasket. Only price comparisons of 28 matched product pairs are considered, ensuring functional equivalence. The study does not cover offline stores, non-FMCG categories, or internal cost structures of companies. Its scope is restricted to understanding price disparities based on gender within India's online personal care market.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on gendered pricing, commonly known as the Pink Tax, shows that companies often charge higher prices for products (Fugate, 2010) marketed to women despite minimal differences in formulation or function. Foundational work by Fugate and Phillips (2010) highlights how packaging, color, and symbolic cues create gendered product perceptions, enabling firms to justify price premiums on women's variants.

International evidence, including the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (2015) (NYC, 2015), confirms consistent price gaps across categories, with women frequently paying higher premiums. These differences stem from marketing-driven product differentiation, consumer perception biases, and limited price comparison behaviors.

Indian studies, though relatively recent, indicate similar trends. Sharma (Geetanjali, 2025) (Sharma, 2024), and other product-level analyses report significant price disparities between male and female personal care items on e-commerce platforms. Sector reports from IBEF and FICCI contextualize these findings within India's rapidly growing FMCG market, where branding and packaging strategies strongly influence retail pricing.

Survey-based research further shows that consumer awareness remains low in India (Biswas, P., 2024) (Singh, 2024). Many consumers attribute price differences to quality rather than gendered marketing, enabling firms to maintain gendered pricing with minimal resistance.

Scholars argue that the Pink Tax reinforces gender inequality (Mewara, 2024) by adding hidden financial burdens to women's consumption, especially affecting low-income groups. This positions the Pink Tax not only as a market issue but also as a social equity concern requiring policy attention.

Overall, the literature establishes that the Pink Tax is real, primarily marketing-driven, and sustained by low consumer awareness. Existing research also highlights the need for larger, systematic, multi-platform price analyses—an area this study contributes to through its product-pair comparisons and quantification of category-level premiums.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design:

The study adopts a descriptive-comparative research design to measure and compare prices of men's and women's personal care products without manipulating variables. (Sharma, 2024) This design allows accurate documentation of existing pricing patterns on e-commerce platforms and supports cross-category analysis across brands and product types.

3.2 Data Sources:

The study relies exclusively on secondary data, collected from:

E-commerce platforms: Amazon, Flipkart, Nykaa, BigBasket

Scholarly literature and reports: Journals, articles, industry documents

Product specifications: Brand, quantity, variant, and ingredient details from official listings

These platforms were chosen for price transparency (Nielsen., 2022), standardized product information, and wide availability.

3.3 Sampling Technique:

A purposive sampling method was used to select only men's and women's product pairs that meet specific comparability criteria:

- Same brand
- Same or nearest quantity
- Same category and purpose
- Same platform source

Final sample: 28 matched product pairs across 7 personal care categories.

3.4 Categories Analyzed

The study covers categories known for gender-specific packaging and branding. These include:

- Razors & Cartridges – Typically the most gender-segmented category with strong marketing cues.
- Shampoo & Conditioner – Includes anti-dandruff, smoothing, volumizing variants.
- Deodorants – Strongly differentiated by fragrance and design.
- Perfumes & Body Mists – Noted for aesthetic-driven pricing.
- Body Wash & Shower Gel – Varies by fragrance and moisturizing claims.
- Toothbrushes – Differentiated mainly by color and grip design.
- Moisturizers & Skincare – Preimmunized through fairness, glow, or anti-aging claims.

These categories were intentionally selected due to observable gender-targeted versions, making them ideal for Pink Tax analysis.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure:

- Identify brands offering both variants.
- Extract product information from official listings.
- Verify prices across multiple platforms.
- Record data in structured spreadsheets.
- Clean data by standardizing units and removing mismatched products.

Discounted prices and bundles were excluded to ensure accuracy.

3.6 Analytical Tools & Formula:

Price differences were calculated using the formula:

Pink Tax (%) = (Price of Women's Product – Price of Men's Product) / Price of Men's Product × 100(Sharma, 2024)(Mewara, 2024)

Analysis involved:

- Pairwise comparisons
- Category-wise averages
- Overall mean Pink Tax
- Visual interpretations (graphs, charts)

3.7 Research Hypotheses:

Null Hypotheses (H0):

H01: Women's personal care FMCG products are not priced significantly higher than comparable men's products in India.

H02: Awareness of the Pink Tax among Indian consumers does not vary significantly across gender and overall awareness is high.

Alternative Hypotheses (H1):

H11: Women's personal care FMCG products are priced significantly higher than comparable men's products in India.(IBEF, 2024)

H12: Awareness of the Pink Tax among Indian consumers is low overall but varies significantly across gender.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

4.1 Category-Wise Analysis of Price Disparity

A. Pink Tax Analysis among Personal Care Products:

Overall Interpretation and Insights:

To provide deeper insights, the analysis was categorized by product type. The following table summarizes the average Pink Tax percentage across each category:

TABLE I:
(PINK TAX ANALYSIS FOR PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS)

Sr No.	Product Category	No. Of Products	Average	Standard-deviation	Coefficient- of variation
1	Razor (Handles /disposables)	2	123.88	22.83	18.43
2	Shampoo & Conditioner	6	22.9	14.31	62.51
3	Deodorant	3	107.25	24.74	23.07
4	Perfume	4	57.73	43.85	75.95
5	Body Wash	4	42.68	19.83	46.46
6	Toothbrush	4	95.67	102.62	107.27
7	Moisturizer	5	97.52	71.03	72.84
		28	78.23	37.30	47.68

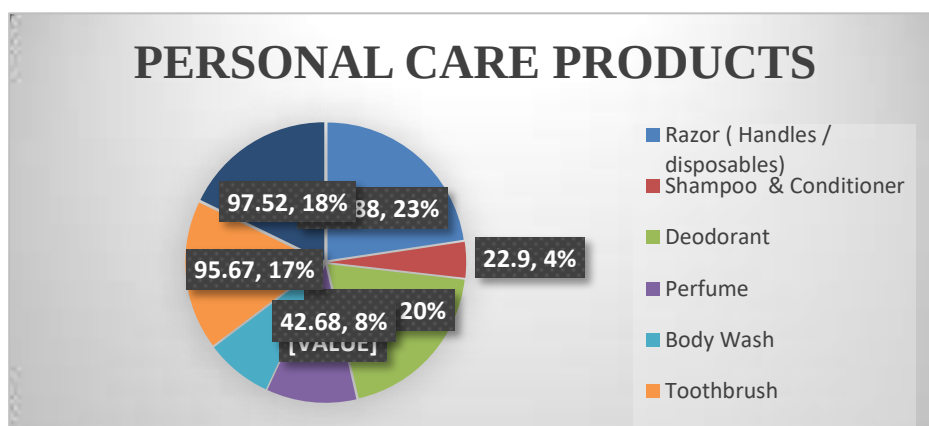


Fig. 1 Pie chart showing category wise analysis of pink tax percentage

The category-wise analysis reveals that the Pink Tax is consistent across all product types, regardless of brand, product size, or function. The highest disparities (razors, deodorants, moisturizers) (Geetanjali, 2025) correspond to categories where appearance and personal grooming are most closely tied to female identity in advertising.

This confirms that gendered marketing - more than production cost - drives pricing differentials. It also highlights the commercial exploitation of societal beauty norms, where female consumers are conditioned to perceive premium pricing as a reflection of personal care and social worth.

Hypothesis Testing: Based on the analysis:

- H_{01} (No significant price difference) → Rejected
- H_{11} (Women's products priced higher) → Accepted
- H_{02} (High awareness of Pink Tax) → Rejected
- H_{12} (Low awareness of Pink Tax) → Accepted

B. Pink Tax Analysis among Non-Personal Care Products:

TABLE II:
OVERALL INSIGHTS FROM THE NON-PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS

Sr No.	Product Category	Product Sub-Category	No. Of Products	Average	Standard Deviation	Coefficient Of Variance
1	Adult Clothing	Jeans	4	22.84	6.48	28.36
2		Jackets	3	54	27.60	51.12
3		Dress pants	3	15.19	7.41	48.81
4		Dress shirt	2	17.51	3.54	20.20
5		Socks	3	28.68	20.05	69.91
6	Child Toys	Scooters	3	34.63	9.43	27.22
7		Bicycle	2	59.68	39.38	65.98
8		Bike Helmet	3	33.17	24.58	74.10
9	Toddler/Child Clothes	Toddler Shoes	4	88.87	117.08	131.75
			27	39.40	23.95	60.79

The " Non-Personal Care Products " in the sample focuses on gender-based pricing disparities in categories beyond personal care. It compares prices for equivalent men's/boys' and women's/girls' products across various brands, calculating the price difference and the "pink tax" percentage (the premium charged for women's/girls' versions relative to men's/boys' equivalents). The data reveals consistent patterns of higher pricing for female-oriented items, contributing to an overall average pink tax of approximately 39.40% across 27 products analyzed. Below is a breakdown by subcategory, highlighting key insights for report integration.



Fig. 2. This chart showing category wise analysis of pink tax percentage

Key Trends:

Across all 27 products, women's/girls' items are uniformly more expensive, with price differences ranging from ₹49 (socks) to ₹7,001 (bicycles). The pink tax averages 39.40%, indicating a broader "gender tax" phenomenon in non-essential goods. Categories like toddler shoes and bicycles exhibit the highest premiums (88.87% and 59.68%, respectively), while dress pants show the lowest (15.19%).

V. FINDINGS

1. Analysis of 28 matched product pairs shows a significant average Pink Tax of 78.23%(Biswas,P, 2024)(Sharma, 2024), confirming strong gender-based price disparities in India's personal care market.
2. Highest Pink Tax levels appear in razors (123.88%), deodorants (107.25%), moisturizers (97.52%), and tooth brushes (95.67%), despite minimal functional differences.
3. Moderate disparities occur in perfumes (57.73%) and body wash (42.68%), while shampoos (22.90%) have the lowest gap due to competitive and standardized pricing.
4. Price premiums are driven mainly by gendered marketing cues—such as packaging, color, and fragrance—rather than ingredient or formulation differences.
5. Low consumer awareness and consistent cross-platform patterns suggest that the Pink Tax is a systemic, market wide practice that increases women's financial burden.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study confirms that the Pink Tax is a widespread and persistent issue in India's personal care FMCG sector (Geetanjali, 2025) (Sharma, 2024). Women pay significantly higher prices for everyday products that offer the same functional benefits as men's variants. This hidden economic burden intensifies existing gender inequalities and highlights the need for stronger consumer awareness, ethical pricing practices, and regulatory intervention. The research adds substantial evidence to the limited Indian literature (Biswas,P, 2024) (Singh, 2024) and reinforces the importance of addressing gendered pricing as part of broader gender equity efforts.

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