

The Occurrence and the Background of 'Pink Tax', the Interaction between Consumers and Industries

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Abstract Pink tax refers to a pricing disparity of goods and services by gender. Discourses on the issue have been steadily growing over the past five years. This study aimed to explore the pink tax phenomenon that has occurred in the domestic (South Korean) fashion industry. Case analyses were conducted with a qualitative approach. The data was collected from online news written from April 2018 to March 2023. The findings expand specific and diverse cases of pink tax within South Korean fashion industry. A total of 196 news articles were collected. Then, the articles duplicated or irrelevant were excluded. Total number of 62 articles were analyzed. The findings reveal the scheme of pink tax occurrence demonstrating the social and cultural background. The industry insiders have the idea of gendered norm, which is eventually applied to their marketing strategy. It led to a lower quality and higher retail price of women's products. There are several implications for academia and industry. This study provides insights under the topic of gender and clothing studies, and for the qualitative research methods of using news article as research data. Fashion brands are advised to consider pink tax free as an attractive option.

Keywords Pink tax, Price disparity based on gender, Price disparity, Gender issues

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Introduction

Pink tax refers to the phenomenon in which women pay more than men for identical or similar goods and services. While there are official statistical data on wage gaps by gender (Choi, 2022), the issue of price differences in everyday consumption, that is, pink tax, has not been sufficiently addressed. From an industry perspective, pink tax occurs when distributors or manufacturers sell products or services at higher prices they set as those 'for women'. A representative example is higher prices paid by women for haircuts or shaving products. Such disparities in consumer prices for essential goods and services cause more long-term economic burdens that women have to bear compared to men. Increased expenses simply based on their gender leads to discussions about unfairness. Therefore, it is crucial to

thoroughly examine pink tax.

In overseas countries, pink tax-related laws and regulations have been attracting the attention by the public. In the United States, through official investigations and reports, the existence of pink tax came to be acknowledged (de Blasio & Menin, 2015), leading to the enactment of relevant legal regulations. In September 2020, in the state of New York an act on pink tax ban took effect (Department of State, 2020), actually prohibiting the practice of charging different prices based on gender for similar goods and services. From January 2023, California has been levying fines of up to \$4,000 to the companies that price products differently based on gender (California Legislative Information, 2023). As such, while the discourse on pink tax

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has been at a public level in the United States and Europe, there have been only sporadic and fragmented discussions in Korean society. Although it was addressed in media articles and news features, a comprehensive analysis of pink tax could not be found, except for reports on a few cases.

This study aimed to examine the phenomenon of pink tax for goods and services in Korean fashion industry. Given the limited academic research on pink tax, an exploratory approach through news article analysis was adopted to investigate the research topic. A comprehensive analysis on fragmented news articles from a consistent framework is the work to understand the overall phenomena and trends. The researcher crawled pink tax-related articles within the past five years to identify the perceived gender-specific consumer characteristics (male consumers vs. female consumers) within the industry and understand pink tax cases in the domestic fashion industry. The aim of this study is, as the basic research on pink tax, to examine its specific domestic cases and identify its occurrence, clarifying ‘perceived gender-specific consumer characteristics within the industry’ as the background of the phenomenon. This research is expected to allow us to grasp the domestic pink tax phenomenon and identify the gender stereotypes and mechanism for occurrence of pink tax perceived by industrial insiders.

Recently, some global companies have taken the initiative in addressing the issue of pink tax. Boxed, Inc., a US online retailer, gained attention by selling women's and men's products at the same price. Dollar Shave Club, another American company, sells products without gender-based differences (Kim & Cho, 2022). In addition, with increasing consumer interest in genderless or unisex products, which do not differentiate between menswear and womenswear, their demand for products with simple design and full functionality is increasing (Xin & Yoo, 2022). A designer Young-mi Woo has presented a gender-neutral collection since 20 fall-winter season. Unlike the fashion industry's practice of presenting men's and women's collections separately, the brand Woo Young Mi was established as the genderless one via a gender-neutral collection. Through genderless or unisex products with the price reasonable and persuasive to consumers, it seems that companies can

generate economic values. As gender issues continue to attract more attention by the public, this study can provide the implications that strategic and timely pricing is necessary rather than pink tax causing gender conflicts.

Literature Review

Concept of Pink Tax and Precedent Studies

Pink tax is understood as the phenomenon where female consumers are forced to pay more for similar or identical goods and services (Guittar, Grauerholz, Kidder, Daye, & McLaughlin, 2022). It is a compound of the English words of color pink, traditionally symbolizing the feminine, and tax. It does not mean a real tax but a ‘tax that is exclusively imposed on women’, causing higher expenses for women's goods compared to those for men. A number of overseas studies reported the pink tax phenomenon after investigating and comparing the price of male and female products available in the market. The earliest research on gender-specific product price investigation and comparison was conducted in 2011 by researchers in the field of gender studies. Dueterhaus, Grauerholz, Weichsel, & Guittar (2011) examined in their studies the gender-specific differences in payment for haircuts, dry cleaning and personal care products within the US industries. It was found that women had to pay an average of \$12 more for a haircut at high-end hair shops and \$1.89 more for dry cleaning for a shirt than men. A survey which compared the prices of 538 personal care products, focusing on online stores, showed significant gender-specific price differences in the categories of deodorants and body sprays. The online stores included in the study were Target, Walmart, CVS, and Walgreens, and the items included a deodorant, shave gel/cream, razor, and body spray. The research findings demonstrated that the needs of the gendered self are satisfied by consumerism and gender-specific expectations learned from socio-cultural basis make women accept higher expenses to maintain femininity.

Subsequently, the Department of Consumer Affairs of New York City conducted the survey of pink tax (de Blasio & Menin, 2015). This report included a more comprehensive

range of product categories compared to those of the previous research. Toys, accessories, and clothes for children/infants and adults, which were not included in the previous study, were added. As a result of the investigation, as for about 800 products examined, 42% of the products were expensive for women, 40% for the same price, and 18% for men (de Blasio & Menin, 2015). This paper included 91 brand products from 5 industries and 24 stores, covering 35 product categories. The product categories included children's toys and wear, accessories, adult clothing, personal care products, and senior healthcare products. The overall average price difference between women's and men's products was found to be 7%, with an average of 8% difference in adult clothing and 13% difference in personal care products (de Blasio & Menin, 2015).

The most recent study on pink tax was conducted by researchers in gender studies, addressing the limitations of previous research. Guittar et al. (2022) conducted an analysis with a sample of 3,282 products, stating as a limitation that previous pink tax studies did not report price per unit volume. This study shows market prices after the act on pink tax ban in New York City, and it paid attention to the disparity difference before and after, if ever. The t-test analysis of price differences by unit volume revealed that women paid more than men for lotions and deodorants but there was no price difference between genders for other items such as a body spray, razor, razor blade, shampoo, body wash, and soap. As for shaving products for men and women, it was found that shaving gel had a higher average price for men than for women. In addition, researchers also mentioned that women's lotions were named Darling, Live in Love, Sweet like candy body mist and Paris rose, showing labeling which aligns with gender stereotypes. While the pink tax phenomenon was no longer observed in various personal care items, it was revealed that gender-specific consumer price differences still persisted in three items such as a lotion, deodorant, and shaving gel, in which differences in gender norms are more visibly evident.

All of three aforementioned studies that conducted a detailed investigation of pink tax were targeted at the U.S. market. Precedent studies on pink tax at the European markets are as follows. There was no official UK data on

pink tax, excluding the one paper (Lafferty, 2019). Based on history of economic disparity of female consumers, legislation and court rulings, and actual tariff differences -15.1% for womenswear and 11.9% for menswear (Taylor & Dar, 2015) -, Lafferty provided the causal explanations on background of pink tax and its persistence. Additionally, there is a paper on pink tax which was conducted in Sweden in 2022 (Kardetoft, 2022), demonstrating that women pay 4.1% more for personal care products. The German IT-related paper pointed out that recommendation systems reproduce gender stereotypes, comparing the prices of womenswear and menswear on the Amazon websites. The study found that women's clothing with a 5% higher price was recommended compared to similar types of men's clothes (Brand & Gross, 2020). In Asia, there is the recent research conducted in the Philippines on consumer perception of pink tax (Chua, Hidalgo, Huyo-a, & Santos, 2022). All of 30 young Filipino female participants had knowledge of pink tax and mentioned they became keenly aware of pink tax when purchasing personal care products. Taking into account the findings from previous studies, it can be understood that there is global interest in the issue of pink tax. However, the literature remains in an exploratory step. More comprehensive and systematic studies are to be carried out.

After reviewing the earlier studies in South Korea under the topic of pink tax, although some papers in the field of women's studies mentioned pink tax (i.e., Choi & Bae, 2022; Kim, 2019; Yoon, 2019), thorough research was not conducted. Moreover, there is a lack of official research data from reliable associations or institutions. However, there are a lot of mentions from internet users through blogs or social network services, and user-centered contents such as YouTube as well as news articles, showing public interest in the issue. As the necessity of research on pink tax is shown, this study aimed to expand the database of pink tax by conducting case analyses in order to gain a better understanding about the issue.

Appearance Management and Gender, Fashion Consumer Goods and Pink Tax

Consumers manage their appearance mainly by consumption

of fashion goods and services. Appearance management refers to the process of adorning overall visual image of individuals through clothing, accessories and so forth to make their appearance stand out (Ahn & Ha, 2019). Standards of appearance reflect the society and culture to which individuals belong. In other words, appearance should be understood as a dimension that emerges through social interactions, requiring a contextual understanding (Kaiser, 1997). In other words, in order to understand the appearance management of female consumers, it is necessary to consider not only factors in individuals but also those in industries, organizations, institutions, societies and cultures. As the socio-cultural factor, gender is an element much influencing appearance management and selection of fashion goods. Gender is a socio-culturally constructed identity as social sex (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2023). It is related to characteristics such as roles, attitudes, images and values expected according to specifically classified gender. Individuals naturally embody cultural norms by social structures from a very young age, including the gender expectations such as femininity and masculinity. It is conceptualized as gender socialization, which means that certain standards, rules and behavioral patterns are expected according to gender through acquired learning (Carter, 2014).

Gender socialization has three levels (Neetu, Stobenau, Ritter, Edmeades, & Balvin, 2017). These include 1) the structural level which encompasses socio-economic conditions, 2) the socio-interactional level which includes family and friends, and 3) the individual level which includes biological instincts. According to studies on color related to the gender socialization in the individual level, it showed that by nature boys prefer color shades of blue or green, while girls prefer those of red and purple (Neetu et al., 2017). In the early childhood when they are not yet exposed to cultural norms, they have different preferred colors by gender. In addition to innate preference based on biological sex, acquired structural and socio-interactional levels reinforce these notions. Exposure to popular culture and media further internalizes and strengthens gender stereotypes regarding femininity and masculinity, influencing individual choices. Ahn and Ha (2019) mentioned in their study that media promotes the pursuit of standardized and formulated

appearance, and particularly for women, it makes them perceive segmented bodily parts, allowing body modification and appearance management to act as the ideology. Furthermore, the researchers pointed out that women experience greater social pressure in terms of appearance evaluation and surveillance compared to men. Women tend to believe much more that their success is directly depending on their appearance.

It can be inferred that women consumers are more likely to purchase consumer goods satisfying the gender expectations due to the greater pressure they generally experience regarding appearance management. In order to fulfill standards of normative femininity, they are likely to bridge the gap between the ideal and actual appearance through consumption (Lafferty, 2019). From a fashion industry perspective, in order to maximize profits compared to competitors, it produces and markets products that cater to consumer demands (Abercrombie & Keat, 2003). Accordingly, the fashion industry will produce products under the femininity standards to satisfy consumer needs. In such a process, the industry reproduces images by producing products which meet the existing gender norms and consumers fulfill the gender expectations by selecting and consuming these consumer goods. Market insiders' judgment that than men there is a higher likelihood of women purchasing fashion products or services may be related to pink tax. The research aims to examine the occurrence of pink tax through specific cases.

Methodology

Data Collection

For data collection, internet articles, which were obtained from Naver News tab using the single keyword "pink tax" from January 2018 to March 2023 were collected and analyzed. The Naver News search encompasses comprehensive media categories including local newspapers, magazines and specialized journals as well as daily newspapers. The criteria for the analysis were based on 'whether the articles are addressing pink tax related to fashion consumer goods or services'. Articles that only

mentioned the term without focusing on the topic of pink tax or that included things unrelated to fashion consumption such as crime prevention, transportation, or food, were excluded. Articles related to the awareness of pink tax were included such as those about female consumers' general strikes. Out of the 196 articles obtained, 131 articles that did not fulfill the analysis criteria were excluded. 62 articles were used for the final analysis. Table 1 shows the issue date, title, and publisher of the articles.

Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is to give order, structure and meaning to the collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). According to Lewins & Silver (2006), data analysis is defined as the process of identifying topics, concepts, processes or situations to establish or expand theories through qualitative data and interpreting the data through coding. Padgett (1998) described the basic of qualitative analysis is simplifying the data and organizing in a systematic manner.

Table 1. The articles analyzed in this study

Date	Title	Publisher
2018-08-18	"Long padded jacket. While women's have half amount of filling material, but why is the price same?" Female consumers are angry.	Chosun-ilbo
2018-09-10	"Pink tax." "Corset." Women's language. Into the world.	Sunday Seoul
2018-09-13	[Snap time] Snap time fact check...pink tax, is it more expensive for women?	E-daily
2018-10-01	[CS] "For women, it's more expensive"...Gender discrimination price 'pink Tax'	TV Chosun
2018-10-03	"Short cut? Why did you do that?"	Ilda
2018-10-04	Padded jacket, discrimination against women? Why is the price same when it has low percentage of fillings?	Asia Econ.
2018-10-04	[Did I have to find out?] "Long padded jacket, why do women pay more?" (Roundup)	Asia Econ.
2018-10-08	[14F/1008] Winter Tips: Padded jacket is for men!	MBC
2018-10-18	[Economy] It's more expensive for women?	MBC
2018-10-23	[Card News] "It's the same product, but it's more expensive for women"...Gender discrimination. "pink tax."	Yonhap News
2018-11-08	[U.S. Mid-term Election] Michigan legalizes recreational marijuana, Dismisses Nevada's 'Pink Tax'	Newsfim
2018-11-29	Does sexism arise from cosmetics? What is pink tax? [Knowledge term]	Sisun News
2018-12-02	Common sense 7 [First week of December 2018_Sisun News]	Sisun News
2018-12-18	[Today's word] pink tax	E Today
2019-02-18	Gillette Inc.'s image of Fembertizing, which was in crisis...	Economy Chosun
2019-04-30	[Card News] It's the same product, but it's more expensive because it's for women? "pink tax."	Civic News
2019-05-01	[Today's economic term] pink tax.	Busan Economy
2019-05-08	[Trend Zoom-in] In the era of 'Sheconomy', the industry is paying attention to female consumers who are willing to pay	Dailypop
2019-06-02	[Horizon] The fear that female consumers have	Hankookilbo
2019-06-09	[One-click suggestion] pink tax.	Bridge Econ.
2019-06-10	You pay more because you're a girl? "pink tax."	Civic News
2019-06-22	The Sheconomy craze..."I pay more because I am a girl." a controversy over pink tax.	Youngnam-ilbo
2019-06-28	Why should we pay more for cats and the color of pink?(Video)	E-daily
2019-07-25	Why is it more expensive – hair cut service	Women News
2019-08-13	"Boycott for misogyny companies"... Another lesson of Kolmar Korea	Money S
2019-10-07	"The first Sunday of every month, women who stopped consuming."	Woman Econ.
2019-11-10	The elimination of pink tax in advanced countries...How much is the sanitary pads in Korea?	Aju News
2019-12-24	New York state pushes for pink tax ban	Korea Times
2020-01-23	I don't have money. Hair salons with different cost for men and women to cut...Why?	Money Today
2020-02-15	The pink tax ban in New York.	Korea Times
2020-03-19	"Why is it more expensive for women?" Musinsa, Standard Inc. - 'pink tax' controversy	Metro

Date	Title	Publisher
2020-04-08	[Reporter's Notebook] Fashion industry, if you miss 'sensitivity', customers will leave.	Metro
2020-04-13	<2020 Korea Unfair Report> It is not about right or wrong... Gender discrimination...	Munhwa-ilbo
2020-04-30	"It is the same hair cut"...Why are the prices different by gender?	E-daily
2020-06-02	Even though the products or services are regarded as similar or same... do you know "pink tax"?	Civic News
2020-07-22	"Pink Tax" Is it worth it?	Gyunghyang News
2020-10-02	The prices of products and services cannot be discriminated by the gender.	Korea Times
2020-10-04	New York state, the pink tax ban takes effect	Korea Times
2020-12-02	"Sex discrimination lurks in taxes"...Report on the activities of the youth gender equality promotion group	Yonhap News
2020-12-17	More expensive for women... Young people talk about gender equality issues	Munhwa-ilbo
2021-03-12	[Writer Doran's column] Consumption needs equality.	Woman Times
2021-05-02	The same surgery, different price? Internet users resist to the price differences for breast reduction surgery	Goodmorningcc
2021-06-07	Men's clothes are cheaper and durable? Controversy over gender discrimination even in clothing consumption.	Money Today
2021-06-10	Poor features, but more expensive? Representative of the 'pink tax' controversy, 'Musinsa Slacks'	Newsworker
2021-06-14	'Calling for a boycott of Nike' ..."It is the same products, but made differently?"	Segye-ilbo
2021-07-19	"Why is the neck finish different? "pink tax" spread to the products of Top Ten Inc.	Newsworker
2021-09-02	[Women's Newspaper No. 1661] The reason why women are looking for men's clothes is because of the trend of pink tax	Women News
2021-11-10	The unfairness of pink tax – it is more expensive because she's a woman?	Incheon-in
2022-04-04	The fake goods lawsuit that ended in Musinsa Inc. lose... In the past, controversy over pink Tax ... damage on the image of the company	Newsworker
2022-11-30	[Gender Economy] poor quality and costs more for women... even with the luxury tax.	News Today
2023-02-14	Pink tax? The tax on women's underwear is more expensive than that on men's.	Munhwa-ilbo
2023-02-14	'Pink tax' controversy as a hot issue..."U.S. women pay more consumption taxes"	News1
2023-03-07	"I do not like pink tax". A hair salon without sex discrimination is on the rise.	Seoul Econ.
2023-03-08	1.8 times more expensive when women do hair cut...2030 refuse hairdressers to pay pink tax	Newsis
2023-03-08	What do you think about pink tax?	CJB
2023-03-10	It's wrong to pay more for haircut because you are a woman.	Wikitree
2023-03-10	[In-depth look] "Do women pay more?" pink tax that are prevalent throughout the living cost.	JTBC News
2023-03-10	"It is more expensive because you are a girl?" 'pink tax' controversy	Maeil Econ.
2023-03-10	"I do not like pink Tax. Self-cutting". The difference in prices for hair cut between men and women remains 1.8 times.	Segye-ilbo
2023-03-11	"It's the same hair cut, but why is it 10,000 won more expensive?"...women are angry	Korea Econ.
2023-03-11	When I asked why women should pay more	Segye-ilbo
2023-03-14	Do you want to pay more because of your gender identity? Do you know pink tax?	Sisa Cast

The traditional approach to qualitative data analysis is as follows (Choi, 2008), and it was applied to data analysis in this study. Firstly, it begins with repeated readings of the raw data. Texts are to be read repeatedly, ideas that come to mind are to be noted and the contents are to be fully understood. Secondly, the relationships between the data are schematized and presented. It is possible to identify and structure the overall outline through schematization. Thirdly, based on the formulated structure, data are to be classified, combined, and reorganized to derive meaningful categories, themes and

types. The researchers add their interpretations to find meaning. Based on the methodology above, data analysis was conducted, deriving the following research findings.

Findings

Based on analysis of the words of industry insiders in the articles, the scheme was derived on the overall outline of pink tax occurrence as shown in the figure 1 below.

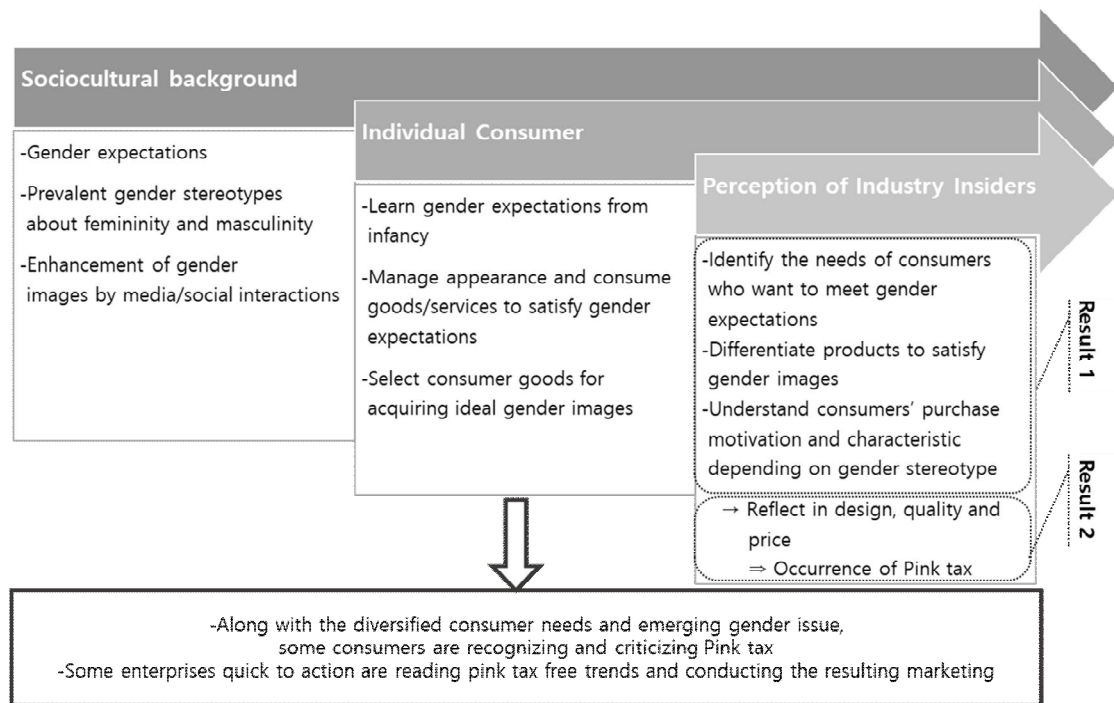


Figure 1. The scheme of pink tax occurrence

The scheme allows us to approach the phenomenon of pink tax from a contextual perspective based on the theoretical backgrounds and research findings. First, the macro-level factor of the sociocultural background affecting the individuals and industries appears on the far left of the scheme. Gender expectations, gender stereotypes, and reinforcement by media in the sociocultural background influence individuals. Individuals internalize sociocultural gender norms from early childhood, unconsciously learning about the ideal gender image. Since appearance management is done through consumption, they consume goods and services that can satisfy gender expectations. The industry identifies these consumer needs, dividing them into male and female consumers according to the traditional gender stereotype, and applies generalized purchase decision-making and motivations of male/female consumers. It is reflected in product planning, quality and pricing, resulting in the occurrence of pink tax. The contents within the dotted boxes of the scheme show these research findings derived from

various cases.

Perceived Gender-specific Consumer Characteristics in the Industry

According to the articles, insiders (producers or stakeholders) in the fashion & textile industries had the opinions that while female consumers prioritize design and fit over quality, male consumers consider quality, functionality and value for money. Based on these above, they were producing goods satisfying consumer needs. Interviews with the industry insiders in the articles revealed their opinions about consumers according to gender.

It seems that this is because women often value fit more than quality, and men often consider functionality and value for money. (Kim & Cho, 2022)

In the case of products with high consumption, as

competition intensifies, quality tends to improve, and price becomes more affordable but it's not the case for fashion markets. It's because of difference in consumption by gender. Menswear market focuses more on durability and quality, while womenswear with fluctuating trends focuses on design. (Kim & Cho, 2022)

In other words, womenswear reflects normative femininity and focuses on design rather than functionality. In addition, female consumers were regarded to prioritize fit over quality, with emphasis on fashion over durability. Such a gender stereotype is also reflected in the category of children's wear, in which girls' products emphasize femininity such as being "girly" and "tender" rather than functionality or activity. As for winter clothes, it was demonstrated that women's padded jackets put emphasis on a slim fit and a waistline rather than protection against the cold.

In case of more active boys, their parents purchasing goods focus on such aspects but girls' parents focus on femininity and softness. (Kim & Cho, 2022)

When female customers buy a padded jacket, they want something both warm and slim. It is unreasonable to compare menswear and womenswear only with padding. (Kim & Cho, 2022)

As shown in the articles, for womenswear and menswear, industry insiders were reflecting gender norms with differentiation between femininity and masculinity. In case of children's wear or winter clothes with an emphasis on activity and functionality, there was a difference in priority given to clothing products according to gender. They replied high price is charged on the premise that women place more added value on a particular fit or design.

Furthermore, in the industry, women were recognized as major consumers of fashion goods, who were willing to pay more than men. They were also regarded to have greater

interest and involvement when deciding the purchase. Production cost for details in womenswear, emphasizing fashion and aesthetics, increases and additional process causes difference in price.

As women's products tend to have faster-changing trends compared to men's, more labor has to be invested in product design and production, and the designs themselves are more intricate. (Seo, 2019)

Due to the complexity and meticulousness in women's products, they tend to have relatively higher prices. (Seo, 2019)

Women have more interest in beauty and fashion compared to men, and they are more willing to spend money on purchasing goods. Companies have no choice but to set prices based on market principles. (Seo, 2019)

Various Cases of Pink Tax

There are various cases where gender stereotypes of industry insiders are reflected in product price or quality.

On the 6th, I visited 5 clothing stores in Seoul and compared more than 10 types of men's and women's T-shirts with similar price ranges (10,000~20,000 won). Most menswear contained 30-50% polyester, but most womenswear contained 100% cotton. Polyester is a material that does not wrinkle easily and is durable. (Oh, 2021)

In the case of womenswear, even if the design and composition are similar to menswear, the prices are approximately 5,000 to 10,000 won higher. For example, both men's and women's polo shirts of Brand A had collars and a similar polyester ratio of 30-40%, but the price of womenswear was 10,000 won higher. In case of the Brand B, the t-shirts had the same over-fit design and were made of 100% cotton, but womenswear was

priced 3,000 won higher. (Oh, 2021)

In case of clothing products, unlike cosmetics which may be divided into package and content(function), their evaluation requires consideration of various factors such as the composition, material, design, details, and dyeing process. Therefore, it is not easy to compare products with the same function. Accordingly, in the first example, comparison was conducted for the quality of men's and women's t-shirt products with a similar price. The results showed that when the prices of clothing products are similar, menswear show improvements in terms of activity and manageability. In the second example, when the materials and designs are similar, it revealed that the price paid for womenswear was higher. These research findings indicate that gender stereotypes within the industry influence the price and composition of products.

The following example shows that a focus of the clothing behavior is put on functionality and fashionability depending on gender, leading to the limited functionality in womenswear. In addition, in the composition of garments, additional decorations for functionality were more commonly used in menswear, while in womenswear, functional components were sometimes omitted for the sake of design. In the last example, when comparing products that included the same media pockets, it was found that womenswear was priced in the 120,000won range, while menswear was priced in the 60,000 won range, even though they had the same functions, indicating that women's products were priced more than twice as high.

A company official explained that menswear and womenswear have different intentions in planning, with a focus on functionality for men's and on fashionability for women's. And he added for womenswear hidden banding or silicone printing not good for the design was eliminated. In addition, he mentioned that the emphasis was placed on drape and fit. (Cho, 2020)

The training suit called 'Essential Pants' sold on the official website has an extra pocket called

'Media Pocket' on the upper part of the back (waist) for men's. (Kang, 2021)

There was also gender-specific difference in quality in terms of fabrics and finish. There was controversy regarding the quality differences in boys' and girls' t-shirts in domestic children's clothing brand.

When I visited a clothing store myself, I noticed differences between men's and women's clothing. In case of pants, men's had deeper pockets while women's had no pockets or shallow pockets. Especially, in case of back pockets in womenswear, simulated pockets were sometimes found. I also felt differences in material and finish. There was clearly lower quality finish in womenswear in terms of fabric fastness and sewing. In fact, there was controversy surrounding Company T last year regarding the quality difference between boys' and girls' shirts in the same line. Despite the same product name and price, there were significant differences in the finish of the neckline. (Kim & Cho, 2022)

In the above case, the quality difference was visible in the neckline finish depending on gender in children's t-shirts despite the same price. It turned out that the reason why the finish for boys is of better quality than that for girls is that boys' wear does not change greatly depending on the season, while girls' wear has various seasonal changes. In other words, for girls, it may be interpreted there is a compromise between quality and fashion to emphasize the latter. The followings are answers by the sewing association official and the company insider from the extracted interviews.

Womenswear uses lightweight and inexpensive fabrics, and compared to menswear, the flowing fit significantly reduces the number of sewing, so consumers can feel that the quality is relatively inferior. (Kim & Cho, 2022)

The official mentioned, due to the nature of boys'

wear, which are designed with similar fabrics and in crew neck every year, the neckline is finished with rib fabric or the same fabric as the upper. On the other hand, girls' wear has relatively diverse fabrics and designs, so it has necklines finished with the same fabric as the upper instead of rough rib fabric, or sometimes, the inner neck finishing may be excluded for wearing convenience. (Hwang, 2021)

Overall, it was found that industry insiders understand modern consumers based on traditional gender norms and stereotypes. In a situation where consumers are increasingly having a variety of needs, it can be an easier and more conventional approach to classify consumers based on traditional femininity and masculinity rather than making efforts to satisfy their needs. Even if the price difference between men's and women's products is not explicitly apparent and they are sold at the same price, it can be referred to as an indirect pink tax in which for womenswear, cost reduction is done in fabric or sewing.

Another pink tax case regarding services could be found from haircuts and dry cleaning. According to data from the Korea Consumer Agency, the average price difference between men's and women's haircuts in Seoul was found as 9,616 won. The cost of dry cleaning showed a difference of about 1,000 won, with men's shirts priced at 1,800 won and women's shirts priced at a minimum of 2,800 won.

A hair shop in Seoul visited by JTBC reporters on the 10th was charging 30,000 won for a female cut and 25,000 won for a male cut. That is, pricing different according to gender. In fact, according to statistics of Trust Price from the Korea Consumer Agency, last month the average cost of haircuts for women in Seoul was 21,308 won, about 1.82 times higher than 11,692 won for men. (Jang, 2023)

The company explained by stating that they have a mass production system for men's shirts, which

reduces labor costs. However, given that even men's linen shirts, rather than standardized dress shirts, were priced lower at 2,300 won than 2,800 won, this argument seemed difficult to justify. (Kim & Cho, 2022)

The pink tax phenomenon was observed in the price differences of haircuts and dry cleaning services in Korea confirming the same trends of overseas cases. Even if the amounts may be small, these are services frequently used in daily lives. Accordingly, if accumulated over a certain period of time, it can result in significant differences in expenses.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed at examining the occurrence of pink tax in the domestic fashion industry through a variety of specific cases. It analyzed the trends over the past five years that have undergone great changes from the articles collected, and derived the characteristics of its occurrence. In addition, the study contributed to confirm the backgrounds that cause the occurrence of pink tax in the industry from socio-cultural and industrial contexts. Findings show that reportedly women's products are more likely to be offered at higher prices compared to men's products when goods have the same functionality and quality. There are cases that in fashion goods for women, functionality is undervalued and there is a compromise between quality and design to improve the latter. For men's, durability and functionality are prioritized in product planning and sales. Accordingly, the study identified a lot of cases where men's clothing products have functional details not included in women's or where they have higher quality of material and finish than women's. It may be originated from the perception of traditional gender norms industrial insiders have. The industry divides consumers into the male and female to understand the characteristics of consumers, planning goods based on their gendered features and reflecting the traditional gender ideology in pricing. From a traditional sense, masculinity is understood as a moderate and powerful image, and femininity is understood as a soft and elegant image. It can

be interpreted that modern consumers are understood via the classical gender notion that menswear focuses on durability and functionality and womenswear puts emphasis on fit and design in terms of color, silhouette, and material.

This research has the significance as follows. Paying attention to pink tax, a topic which has not been fully studied in the academia of Korean society, it shed light on the issue of gender-specific price disparity in fashion consumer goods. It also has an academic implication that it provided basic data on the gender issue for research of costume culture and presented a methodological approach for exploratory research on topics that have not been extensively studied. It is expected to be helpful for researchers using newspaper articles as data for analysis. Furthermore, through the understanding of the schema of pink tax, this study presented visual data useful for identifying its socio-cultural or industrial backgrounds. Practical implications and suggestion of the study are as follows. When applying traditional gender notions uniformly to understand male and female consumers, it may lead to a lack of understanding of the current market situations with varied consumer needs. Although the research findings showed cases where functionality and activity were limited to prioritize design in womenswear, not all women prefer design-centered purchases. Generalizing outdated consumer characteristics can cause consumer complaint and damage to the company image. Furthermore, along with the changing social trends since 2000s, there have been efforts to respect individual tastes and escape from gender stereotypes. At the same time, gender equality is emerging as a major issue, and genderless and gender neutral are attracting attention in the fashion design field. In addition to the case of the designer Young-mi Woo mentioned in the introduction, the number of clothing brands with genderless and unisex products as their main product line is increasing. As shown in research findings, unlike the division between femininity (lightness, softness, high sensitivity, aesthetics, and trendiness) and masculinity (functionality, activity, durability) according to gender, genderless styles are gaining popularity among the younger generation, in which distinction comes to be ambiguous and gender boundaries are blurred. With the increasing demand for genderless styles, the marketers that have incorporated pink tax-free pricing

strategies, along with such product planning, can leverage these efforts by integrating them into marketing communications as industrial opportunities.

The research has certain limitations in terms of its scope. As the basic research on pink tax, the study tried to give a focus on illustrating the pink tax phenomenon in the domestic fashion industry. Hence, it examined various cases of pink tax in terms of the price disparity in goods/services, quality and design. However, the investigation could not consider why such price disparity occurs or whether the production costs for gender-specific styles are actually influencing in pricing. In addition, unlike cases of personal care products or cosmetics, it is difficult to categorize clothing products based on their functions and compare their prices at the same level. Hence, complete enumeration or comparison of prices could not be conducted. Through systematic and standardized classification of clothing products, follow-up studies will be able to contribute to pink tax research by conducting a price investigation that controls materials and details and presenting the comparative results. Even though the industries are limited to fashion in this research, it will be worth expanding its scope to personal care products, cosmetics, toys for young children and daily necessities for seniors.

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