

**Misbranding and Trademark Infringement of Pakistan's Himalayan Pink Salt in
International Markets: A Case for International Legal Perspective and Policy Framework**



Submitted by

Nigham Fatima

Enrollment No. 01-257241-006

MS IR

Supervised By

Dr. Syed Aleem Gillani

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Bahria University, Islamabad

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THESIS COMPLETION CERTIFICATE

Scholar's Name: Nigham Fatima

Program of Study: Master of Science (International Relations)

Registration No. 01-257241-006

Thesis Title: Misbranding and Trademark Infringement of Pakistan's Himalayan Pink Salt in International Markets: A Case for International Legal Perspective and Policy Framework

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Principal Supervisor: Dr. Syed Aleem Gillani

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Principal Supervisor's Signature: _____

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Name of Student: Nigham Fatima

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DEDICATION

With profound gratitude, I dedicate this research to Allah Almighty, the most Merciful and the most Gracious, the source of all knowledge and wisdom whose guidance and blessing illuminated my paths. To my beloved Parents for their unconditional love, prayers, and countless sacrifices throughout my journey. And to my dearest friend, whose continuous motivation and encouragement has been a constant source of strength in every step of my life.

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt holds a position of valuable commodity of Pakistan, which has gained a global popularity due to its taste, purity and uses in variety of products. But, due to lack of advanced measures and advocacy, pink salt is a subject of misbranding in global markets, leading to 25-56 million dollars revenue loss annually. Most of the pink salt is exported in crude or raw form and later, processed abroad, leading to deprivation of Pakistan economic potential. The research explores the implications of pink salt misbranding in international markets on Pakistan export's income and consumer perceptions regarding authenticity and reputation of Pakistani products. In 2020, Pakistan Implemented a Geographical Indication Act, 2020 to protect pink salt from exploitation in international markets but more efforts are needed as pink salt is still being misbranded by foreign entities in international markets. The study adopts quantitative-qualitative mixed-method research while, case study design constructed upon a multi-dimensional theoretical approach. Through triangulation of trade data, legal document review, digital platforms' observation, primary survey and stakeholders' interviews, the research evaluates both the economic consequences of misbranding and Pakistan institutional and legal weaknesses. The findings reveal that Pakistan's current protection framework lack effective branding strategies, legal enforcement, marketing and regulatory follow-through. The study argues and suggested that effective legal recognition, international GI enforcement, strategic trademark, branding and marketing strategy are essential to secure Pakistan commercial rights and convert pink salt from an exploited natural resource into a geo-economic advantage. The research further sets a policy roadmap that can be extended to safeguard other Pakistani origin-based commodities vulnerable to similar misappropriation in international markets.

Key Words:

Pink Salt, Trademark Dispute, Geographical Indication, Misbranding, Economic Development, Brand Dilution, Consumer Perception

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Salt is a basic necessity of human life. As an irreplaceable element, it has long been used as a food flavor, medication, and the preservation of food items. Apart from daily diet, salt is used in so many things like detergents, home decoration, soaps, beauty products such as spas, saloons, hydrotherapy, clubs, and massage parlors. The industrial uses involve manufacturing of soda ash and caustic soda. It is also used in de-icing of roads in winters, therapeutic industry as well as dyeing. This all add significance of salt into human life. From modern archeological studies, we have come to know that ancient civilizations used to live near the water and salt fields. At some times in history, particularly during the Roman Empire, salt was also used as a medium of exchange during trade. Salt was also used as a wage substitute. Even the modern word “Salary” is derived from salt.¹ In the modern world, the use of salt has greatly expanded. Salt is not just an important element of the human diet but also a basic raw material for several chemical industries. The stats show that there are more than 14,000 commercial uses of salt. From making soaps and detergents to coloring textiles, from using it for health benefits to spa treatments, road thawing, and making decorative products, salt is an essential material.²

However, salt is rarely considered as a matter of national advertisement or puffery, but in Pakistan, it’s a debatable topic in editorials, social media, and even in parliaments now. Pakistan is a proud host of old mines with more than 10 billion tonnes of deposits. The salt range of Pakistan, stretching for 209 kilometers between Indus River and Jhelum, produces about 400 million tonnes of rock salt annually. The Himalayan pink salt, commonly known as “Khewra Pink Rock Salt,” is one of the purest salts, famous for its great health benefits and its striking pink color. It is believed that this Himalayan Pink salt had crystallized 800 million years ago. After Poland, which has the

¹ Acu Pay Thailand Channel, “Did You Know That ‘Salary’ Derives From ‘Salt’ Since Salt Was Once Used as Wages?,” *ACU Pay*, May 7, 2024, <https://acuthai.com/did-you-know-that-salary-derives-from-salt-since-salt-was-once-used-as-wages/>.

² Yang, Yong, and Shangli Wang. “The Development of Salt Resources in Pakistan under the Perspective of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.” *Pacific International Journal*, vol. 5, no. 4, Dec. 2022, pp. 26–32. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.55014/pij.v5i4.233>.

largest salt mines in the world,³ Pakistan is a major producer and exporter of salt, with 4 lakh tons of salt annually exported to the global markets. Pink Salt is a natural resource and a natural treasure for Pakistan. According to a report published by the Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation, Pakistan has around 22.2 billion tons⁴ which are the world's largest pink salt reserves. These salt reserves have three varieties. Pink salt (iron), White salt (sodium chloride), and red salt (magnesium) are produced in Pakistan. The salt mines are in KP and the Punjab province of Pakistan, such as Warcha, Khewra, Kalabagh, Jatta, Karak, and B-Kheel.⁵

Pakistan's potential is substantial. From March 2023 to February 2024 alone, Volza records 3,755 outbound consignments of Himalayan Salt. These exports were made by more than 400 Pakistan Exporters to almost 1200 Buyers, marking a growth rate of 26% compared to the preceding twelve months. Most of these exports go to the United States, China, and Vietnam from Pakistan. Globally, the top three exporters of Himalayan Pink Salt are Pakistan, India, and China. Pakistan leads the world in Salt exports with 12,216 shipments, followed by India with 4,248 shipments, and China taking the third spot with 1,450 shipments.⁶ During the year 2025, Pakistan Himalayan pink salt trade surged up to 33 % with China signaling growing demand of Pakistani pink salt in global markets. Salt export data release by General Administration of Customs of People Republic of China GACC declared that Pak-China pink salt trade reached to 3.93 million dollars.⁷

Besides China, the USA is also a great importer of Pakistani Pink salt due to a variety of reasons, including cooking, treatment, product manufacturing, and even spa treatment.⁸ Globally, top three exporter of pink salt are China, USA and Ukraine. According to Volza report 2024-2025, USA

³ Muhammad Waheed, Majeed, and Syeda Shehwar Zahra. "Khewra Pink Rock Salt as a Registered Geographical Indication of Pakistan." *Trends in Intellectual Property Research* 1, no. 2 (October 3, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.69971/tipr.1.2.2023.12>.

⁴ . Muhammad Sobhan, "Pakistani's Pink Salt Reserves and Export Potential". *Himalayan Pink Salt House PVT.LTD*. Feb 15, 2024. <https://www.salthousepakistan.com/pakistanis-pink-salt-reserves-and-export>

⁵ "Pakistan's Pink Salt Reserves and Export Potential", *SpaGreen*. Accessed April 22, 2025. <https://www.inp.net.pk/news-detail/inp-wealthpk/pakistans-pink-salt-reserves-and-export-potential>.

⁶ "Himalayan Salt Exports from Pakistan", *Volza*." Accessed April 22, 2025. <https://www.volza.com/ogimages/export/h/himalayan-salt-export-from-pakistan-export-shipment.svg>.

⁷ "Pakistan's Salt Exports to China Surge 33 Percent", *Daily CPEC*. August 2, 2025. <https://thedailycpec.com/pakistans-salt-exports-to-china-surge-33-percent/>

⁸ Raheem Maryam. "Himalayan Salt Exports from Pakistan", *Volza*. Jul 24, 2023. <https://www.volza.com/ogimages/export/h/himalayan-salt-export-from-pakistan-export-shipment.svg>.

leads with 41, 278 shipments and Ukraine with 34, 482 shipments. Recently, Pakistan has significantly increased its pink salt exports to Bangladesh ⁹ and African Countries, Uganda and South Sudan.¹⁰ Products made up of this pink salt hold a unique distinction in the world that can portray Pakistan's natural beauty, if branded correctly. This Himalayan Pink salt is used to make candleholders, lamps, and dishes. Many people have seen lamps made of pink salt, but their origins are rarely mentioned. The "made in Pakistan" tag is missing from Pakistan's pink Himalayan salt in global markets.

Pakistan has a great array of economic growth opportunities. Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt holds the position of a valuable and unique commodity that has gained global popularity due to its taste, purity, and uses in a variety of products. But unfortunately, this national treasure of Pakistan is rebranded and sold by other countries, such as India, to the global markets. Pink salt is being sold at \$20 per ton, while in international markets it costs \$10 per kilogram.¹¹ The revenue which is being generated by India generates by selling Pakistani pink salt to global markets has led to huge losses to Pakistan's export sector. Besides this, misbranding salt is creating a brand dilution and false product perception in global markets. It questions the authenticity of Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt as it can create a distrust of labeling among consumers, which can ultimately affect the quality of Pakistan's exports to international world markets.

In 2018, Pakistan's social media was saturated with the Pakistan pink salt trends when it was discovered that India sells Pakistan pink salt at a markup by using its name in the global market without giving credit to its origin.¹² The study finds that Pakistan's Pink salt was used to export to India as raw stone with an average selling price of \$20-\$40 per ton, while its average price in the international market is \$10 per kilogram. Whereas India used to process this raw salt into valuable commodities and sell them to global markets, generating revenue of \$26-\$50 million annually.

⁹ "Himalayan,salt Imports In Bangladesh From Pakistan - Market Size & Demand Based On Import Trade Data", *Volza*. Aug 22, 2025. <https://www.volza.com/p/himalayan-or-salt/import/import-in-bangladesh/coo-pakistan/>

¹⁰ "Gujranwala products shipped to display centre in Africa", *DAWN News*. July 3, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1921806>

¹¹ Hussain Bilal. "SMAP Raises Concerns over Proposed Ban on Raw Pink Salt Exports." *Brecorder*, September 15, 2024. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40322541>.

¹² Daa Hadid. "Pakistan Wants You To Know: Most Pink Himalayan Salt Doesn't Come From India", *NPR*. October 3, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2019/10/03/763960436/pakistan-wants-you-to-know-most-pink-himalayan-salt-doesnt-come-from-india>.

From 2019 to 2021, India exported Pakistani Himalayan salt at \$300 per ton, using its own packaging and product name to various European countries, the US, Korea, Canada, UAE, Spain, and Somalia. More telling is that, due to the absence of a GI tag, several foreign companies have a major share in the global market, and a few of them used to sell this pink salt on Amazon for \$26.40 per 400 grams, which is almost equal to 8,000 PKR per kilogram.¹³

In 2020, Pakistan implemented a Geographical Indication Act, which is a very strong initiative to safeguard the authenticity of Pakistan's Himalayan salt. Pakistan initiated this process to protect its products in international markets from false branding. But despite this act, Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is still misbranded by foreign entities, affecting Pakistan's potential in the salt industry. In 2021, a consumer class action suit was filed in the Southern District Court of New York¹⁴, which referred to the false marketing of Pakistani Himalayan Pink salt by India. It discussed that consumers pay a price premium for products that they perceive to be genuine and authentic, specifically those that are associated with particular places, as Pakistan's pink salt. Consumers are generally misled by fraudulent labeling of pink salt from India, which originally belongs to Pakistan. Case was dismissed in 2022 but it highlighted the continued misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt even after Geographical Indication registration.¹⁵

In recent years, Pakistan has taken several significant initiatives to protect Pakistan Himalayan pink salt in international markets. Through Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan IPO, Pakistan has speedup the efforts for GI registration, making Pakistan Mineral and Development Corporation a GI registrant authority. Moreover, Salt Manufacturer Association of Pakistan SMAP was established under Trade Development Authority of Pakistan TDAP to promote pink salt exports through strategic marketing. Pakistan's government PM'S Outreach Program has set a

¹³ Waheed, Majeed & Zahra, "Khewra Pink Rock Salt as a Registered Geographical Indication of Pakistan." no. 2 (October 3, 2024).

¹⁴ In 2021 in Southern district of New York, several consumers' class action suits were filed including those of false marketing, misbranding of products in markets leading to violations of consumer protection law. These suits targeted various products along with food. Complaints alleged international and local businesses of misrepresentation of products violating consumer protection law.

¹⁵ ALM Staff. "Pink Salt from Pakistan Falsely Marketed as Harvested from the 'Heart of the Himalayas,' Consumer Alleges in Proposed Class Action Suit". *NEW YORK LAW JOURNAL*. Accessed on 3 April, 2025

<https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/2021/10/11/consumer-alleges-that-pink-salt-frompakistan-falselymarketed-as-harvested-from-the-heart-of-the-himalayas-in-class-action-suitagainstcostco/?slreturn=2024111695344>

framework to expand pink salt reach to global markets through B2B interactions with countries like Bangladesh, Nigeria, China, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce had several meetings in past 4 years with foreign delegations, promoting Pakistan unique sources in international exhibitions and events. In 2024, the Punjab Government of Pakistan has decided to ban exports of raw pink salt to India to protect its misbranding in global markets. Withal, the Mines and Minerals Department of Pakistan has also submitted a proposal to the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to ban crude pink salt exports to all countries.¹⁶ In recent Expo in Osaka, Japan, Pakistan hosted interactive sessions on Khewra Pink salt, highlighting importance of pink salt as well as its misbranding in international markets.¹⁷

Pakistan has made notable efforts but issue of misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt in international markets is still there. Despite these coordinated efforts, pink salt GI registration is at early stage since 2020 at international recognition level, ultimately limiting its enforcement abroad. Until Pakistan doesn't make its pink salt a GI recognized commodity, it would be difficult to reach its full potential in international markets. Nonetheless, there are significant measures which Pakistan is taking but there is a dire need of establishing a strong institutional, legal and policy framework to protect cultural and economic identity of its commodities in international world. The misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt by other countries not just only exploit Pakistan economic interests but also affect consumer perception in international markets regarding Pakistan's product identity and brand authenticity, which needs to be settled down.

In increasingly globalized marketplace, international law is a key feature of legal framework. The World Trade Organization, TRIPS Agreement, Paris Agreement, Madrid Agreement and Codex Alimentarius are international legal frameworks which provide legal basis for states to protect products and trademarks from misbranding and illegal activities. These international forums also ensure the flow of truthful information to consumers. Therefore, international regulatory system can help Pakistan to challenge counterfeit labeling and seek legal remedies in international markets against misbranding. Under international laws for trademark and intellectual rights protection, Pakistan can also file lawsuits against those countries that are involved in the misbranding of

¹⁶ "Submitted Proposal to SIFC for Ban on Export & Geographical Indication (GI) of Raw Pink Rock Salt-A First Time Initiative". *Mines & Minerals*. Accessed 25 Apr. 2025. <https://mnm.punjab.gov.pk/node/300>.

¹⁷ "Pakistan's pink-salt themed pavilion 'global crowd-puller' at Osaka Expo", *ARAB NEWS*. April 14, 2025. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2596936/pakistan>

Pakistan's products, and can demand compensation for export income losses and misbranding of Pakistani items.

Pakistan is a land of significant natural resources, with unique properties and geographical identity. The effective legal initiatives and policy framework not only protect Pakistan Himalayan pink salt but it would also set a policy example for several other Pakistani products. Moreover, the research addresses the issue of Pakistan's Himalayan Pink salt misbranding in international markets, which leads to significant loss in Pakistan's economic potential, damage to its global product or brand recognition, and consumers' deception towards Pakistani products in international markets. The study inspects two core questions that How has the misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt by foreign entities in international markets affected Pakistan's economic interests, global reputation, and legal standings? and to what extent have national and international legal frameworks been effective in safeguarding Pakistan's rights over Himalayan Pink salt, and what policy and legal measures are further needed? Therefore, the objective of the research is to understand the socioeconomic implications of misbranding and a pathway towards actionable policy making to achieve sustainable economic growth in the salt sector.

Additionally, the research incorporates secondary as well as primary data such as interviews from relevant key stakeholders and survey from Local Pakistani consumers which reflect the awareness, usage patterns and perceptions regarding pink salt among Pakistanis along with international consumer perception analysis. This provides an empirical foundation to complement trade analysis and legal validations.

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite being home to the world's second-largest salt reserves, Pakistan has failed to capitalize on the economic potential of Himalayan Pink salt. Pakistan is also the world's leading exporter of salt, but the country's origin is often not acknowledged, and this natural treasure is frequently sold in international markets through unauthorized means, contributing to substantial economic loss. The Himalayan pink salt is frequently re-labeled and sold under foreign trademarks, allowing other countries to capture premium markets and consumers. Although Pakistan has taken a few steps towards protecting its natural resources from false branding in global markets but there is still a need for effective policy making. The research aims to examine the socioeconomic implications of pink salt misbranding in Pakistan and assess the efficacy of legal instruments available to Pakistan for claiming and promoting its brand identity to get a commercial advantage in global markets.

1.3. Objectives of the Study:

The primary objective of the research is to explore and highlight the issue of the misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan Pink Salt in global markets, focusing on the trademark dispute in terms of International Law. The study aims to examine how misleading labeling of Pakistan's Pink salt impacts the brand identity, salt export revenue, consumer deception in international markets, and global trade. Although Pakistan has initiated a process to register pink salt under GI but there is still ongoing misbranding, and it needs more effective policies to protect not only Himalayan Pink salt but also the essential products of Pakistan. The research assesses the Pakistan's pink salt's intellectual property concerns and international legal framework regarding trademark disputes. Therefore, the study suggests the effective policy strategy to standardize a strong institutional structure within Pakistan, a legal enforcement mechanism and a well-built branding and marketing approach that can make pink salt industry to reach its full potential.

1.4. Research Questions:

1. How has the misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt by foreign entities in international markets affected Pakistan's economic interests, global reputation, and legal standing?
2. To what extent has the Pakistan's institutional structure and international legal framework been effective in safeguarding Himalayan Pink salt against misbranding, and what policy and legal measures are needed?

1.5. Scope/Significance of Research:

The research highlights the issue of Pakistan's natural resource misbranding by other countries in global markets, exploiting Pakistan's economic potential, brand identity, and consumer perception related to Pakistan's products across global markets. The investigation aims to bring awareness on trademark issues, Intellectual property rights, and the importance of Geographical Indication for national, natural commodities. The study aims at policymaking for protecting Pakistan's products from false branding strategies by other countries. Although the research focuses on Pakistan's Himalayan Pink salt but it sets a model for protecting all other products that are Pakistan's natural treasures, under national and international legal frameworks such as the Geographical Indication Law.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW/ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Literature Review:

Pakistan has a geographical monopoly over salt reserves. Pakistan has huge salt deposits in Punjab and KP. In the foothills of the Himalayas, the Khewra salt mines are located, which are the world's second-largest salt range. From this mine, Pakistan produces 40 to 30 0000 tons of salt annually. The country has the potential to earn 12-13 billion dollars from Himalayan Pink salt. This is an immense flair to kick-start a massive economic activity through salt exports.¹ Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt exports include edible salt, bath salts, salt lamps, Spa, and various wellness products. Pakistan's proximity to the salt mines, huge salt reserves, and its established infrastructure for mining and exporting give it a competitive edge in the global market. Pakistan is also one of the largest salt exporters to the world. The USA is the greatest importer of Pakistan's pink salt. Besides the USA, Pakistan's salt exports also increased with China in recent years.² But, despite being the greater exporter of pink salt, statistics of Himalayan salt exports in 2023 have shown that Pakistan is also the greater importer of pink salt from countries like Vietnam in a value-added form.³

Pakistan is not achieving a significant revenue generation through its pink salt due to a lack of advanced measures and advocacy. This is because foreign entities like India are being involved in the misbranding of Pakistan's Himalayan Pink salt in global markets. Pakistan has a significant edge over India in salt exports due to its purity and several benefits. India is also an importer of Pakistan pink salt at very low rates. Reports have shown that pink salt from Pakistan was used to export as a raw stone to India with an average price of 40\$ per ton.⁴ This cheap salt, which

¹ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MOIB). "US leading company to invest \$200m in Pakistan in Pink Salt industry". May 13, 2023.

<https://www.moib.gov.pk/News/53247#:~:text=Government%20of%20Pakistan&text=An%20American%20leading%20company%20in,Pink%20Himalayan%20Salt%20in%20Pakistan>

² Mariam Raheem, "Himalayan Salt Exports from Pakistan", *Volza*. Jul 24, 2023. <https://www.volza.com/ogimages/export/h/himalayan-salt-export-from-pakistan-exportshipment.svg>.

³ "The Himalayan Salt Import Export Data & Importers Exporters List in 2023", *Tendata*. Sep 9, 2024. <https://www.tendata.com/blogs/import/6062.html>.

⁴ Waheed, Majeed & Zahra, "Khewra Pink Rock Salt as a Registered Geographical Indication of Pakistan." no. 2 (October 3, 2024).

originates from Pakistan, has been sold to global markets by India after packaging and advertising with huge amounts, but without recognition of its Pakistani source.

An extensive study of reports, articles, blogs, and statistics, it is analyzed that Pakistan has not benefited even from its product despite 25-56\$ million annual revenues generated due to misbranding of Pakistan's pink salt by India in global markets. This declares that Pakistan is letting India make billions of dollars from Pakistan's treasure.⁵ This also referred to economic statecraft used by India to pursue strategic objectives in international relations. The classical framing of Baldwin termed economic statecraft as an instrument of reframing misbranding not only as an intellectual property issue but also as a contest over capturing global value commerce chains. When a resource is exported in raw form, the origin country loses the opportunity to gain higher margins of economic benefits, rents, jobs and leverages due to lack of effective processing, branding and marketing of resource products. This situates Himalayan pink salt case within strategic choices about a state practice to transform from a raw exporter to value-capturer.

The detailed evaluation of existing facts and figures suggests that the major reason for mislabeling Pakistan commodities in global markets is due to a lack of value addition and cheap exports of items in raw form, such as pink salt is exported to India in crude form at very low rates, which is then rebranded and advertised as Indian product in international markets. Also, the institutional weaknesses of Pakistan to protect and promote pink salt in international markets is another factor. Recently, Pakistan has taken a few measures, such as efforts to register commodities under Geographical Indication (GI) protection, and banning raw pink salt exports to China and India. But still, there is a need for advanced measures to safeguard national income potential.

The Study aims to bring awareness to trademark issues, Intellectual property rights, and the importance of Geographical Indication for national, natural commodities. Scholars and practitioners characterize Geographical Indications as a principal Intellectual Property IP tool for protecting a product that has unique geographical origin. The objective to protect geographical Indications is to eliminate the unfair competition in global markets for genuine producers as well as consumers. From the extensive literature analysis, it seems that developed countries are well

⁵ Shazam, "The Pink Gold of Pakistan; How India is making Billions of Dollars off Pakistani Rock Salt", *World Defence*, Sep 10, 2019. <https://world-defense.com/threads/the-pink-gold-of-pakistan-how-india-is-making-billionsof-dollars-off-pakistani-rock-salt.7038/>

aware of the importance of intellectual property rights, trademark protection, and geographical indications. For instance, the European Union has a great number of geographical indications in the agriculture sector. In 2024, the World Intellectual Property Rights Organization published data for countries with a great concentration of GI registrations. According to the report data, China had the most registered GIs, 9785 in force. Then, there is Germany with 7586 GIs, Italy with 6330 GIs, France with 6098 GIs, and the European Union had approximately 5736 GI registrations in 2023.⁶

The importance of Geographical Indication for registering the origin can be better understood by the Chile wine case study. Chile is a greater exporter of wines in the southern hemisphere and the fourth largest wine producer and exporter across the world. Nevertheless, competitors like Australia, New Zealand, and California are there, and maintaining a global recognition or brand identity for a developing country like Chile is a difficult thing.⁷ In order to protect its wines from infringement in international markets, Chile registered its wines under GI in 2002. In 2019, Chile exported more than 1.4 billion dollars GI GI-registered wines to international markets.

An Indian Author, C. Niranjan Rao, has written an article in the Economic and Political Weekly Journal of India regarding Darjeeling Tea, a similar case as Pakistan's Himalayan Pink salt. In the article, the author has highlighted the issue of misbranding of Darjeeling Tea, which is actually produced in the hilly areas of the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. This tea is a valuable commodity for India in global markets but counterfeited by Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Kenya, which leads to Indian's brand dilution and consumer deception for Indian products in global markets. To counter this, the author has suggested the implementation of the TRIPS Agreement to get a certification mark for Indian Darjeeling Tea in order to protect it from misbranding globally.⁸

⁶ “China had over 9,700 GIs in force in 2023, three-quarters of which were protected through the trademark system”, *WIPO*. Accessed on, April 27, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/web-publications/ip-facts-and-figures->

⁷ Jasmin Munoz & Sofia Boza, “Protection by origin in Chile and the European markets: the case of the wine sector”. *World Trade Institute*. November 2017. https://www.wti.org/media/filer_public/8d/23/8d234fa5-d456483f-8def-79ea8009392d/munozbozasecowp.pdf.

⁸ C, Niranjan Rao, “Geographical Indications in Indian Context: A Case Study of Darjeeling Tea”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, No. 42 (Oct. 15-21, 2005): 3-6. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4417300>

Similar to the Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt case, there was also a conflict between India, Pakistan, and the US. Company over Basmati Rice. In 1997, a US company named RICE TECH received a patent for aromatic basmati rice, which is produced in India and Pakistan, under specific conditions. This illegal branding and infringement by US US-based company over Basmati rice could have been a huge loss to Pakistan and India's rice exports and their brand identities. Basmati Rice, as a special product, not only had a huge market in the US, UK, and EU but also had great prices there.⁹ Under international legal pressures, RICE TECH withdrew its claim over basmati rice patents. After that, India registered its Basmati rice under GI, including seven Indian states in 2016. While Pakistan got it registered in 2021 under the Geographic Indication.

The Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is not only misbranded tangibly but also through virtual platforms. In the era of digitalization and e-commerce, online market places host numerous listings where pink salt is deceptively marketed under labels other than Pakistan. A comparative analysis of pink salt product listings across various platforms reveals the geographic misrepresentation of a commodity and widespread false branding of Pakistan's Pink Salt. Many global retailers fail to accurately acknowledge the origin of their products in their labeling and product descriptions. Regional references, such as "Himalayas" or "Asia", are commonly used, effectively erasing Pakistan's provenance. This digital misrepresentation and false advertisement not only divert Pakistan's legitimate economic revenue but also distorts global consumers, affecting Pakistan's brand identity in international markets. For Pakistan, this highlights the untapped potential of its salt reserves and the urgent need to adapt geo-economic strategies such as GI protections, trade diplomacy, and brand marketing.

The global recognition of Geographic Indication as an Intellectual Property Right became prominent in 1994 with the TRIPS Agreement. Before this, GIs were protected merely under national laws with limited scope and effectiveness, if a state has them. TRIPS Agreement has established a GI protection mechanism, prohibiting the use of the GI tag to falsely identify a good's origin. The TRIPS Agreement defines GIs and obliges members of World Trade Organization to provide certain level of protection to products which have special territorial, cultural or traditional identity. Similarly, Paris Agreement and Madrid Agreement also provide protection to intellectual

⁹ Suman Sahai, "Protecting Basmati", *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol. 33, No. 9. March 6, 1998. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4406454>

properties and offer legal obligations on import-export of falsely branded products.¹⁰ Although TRIPS provides a framework for GI protection but many states also have established national legal frameworks and strategies to protect their national commodities from false branding in global markets. European Union GIs protection is accompanied by *sui generis* Legislation which provides a substantial level of protection to food and agricultural products more than that which is mandated by the TRIPS agreement.¹¹

Mislabeled of Pakistan Pink salt by India in global markets constitutes false, illegal branding and misleading advertisement under international law. In the modern global marketplace, where branding shapes consumer perception and trade identity, international treaties are there to serve as a legal backbone for safeguarding intellectual properties, geographical indications and trademarks across borders. Many of these treaties, establish coherent rules to prohibit the unauthorized use and imitation of unique products, goods and services of any country. The World Intellectual Property Organization WIPO is a specialized, international agency to advocates trademark protection and intellectual property rights across the globe. There are several trademark-related treaties which are administered by WIPO, such as the Paris Convention, the Madrid Protocol, the Madrid Agreement, the Vienna Agreement, the Trademark Law Treaty, the Nairobi Treaty, Singapore Treaty.¹² Advertised by WIPO, the Paris Convention involves industrial property rights, including industrial designs, trademarks, patents, utility models, service marks, geographical indications, trade names, and the repression of unfair competition. Article 10 Bis of the Paris Convention prohibits the act of misleading consumers or the public about the quality and origin of goods, products, or services.¹³

In addition to this, there is the Madrid Agreement, concluded in 1891, which protects brand names and labels internationally. According to the Madrid Agreement, all goods bearing a deceptive indication of source, through which one of the Contracting States is directly or indirectly indicated

¹⁰ “Intellectual property is a powerful tool for growth and sustainable development”, *WIPO*. Accessed on Oct 9, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/portal/en/index.html>

¹¹ Bassem Awad, Marsha S. Cadogan “The Development of Legal Protection for GIs around the World”, *CETA and the Future of Geographical Indications Protection in Canada*. May 1, 2017. P 2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep15528.9>

¹² “What is a trademark” *WIPO*. Accessed on, 16 April, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/web/trademarks>.

¹³ “Law 797-J: International Intellectual Property: Trademarks”, *Illinois College of Law Library*. Accessed on, <https://libguides.law.illinois.edu/c.php?g=436697&p=2977076> .

as being the place of origin, must be seized on importation, or such importation must be prohibited, or other actions and sanctions must be applied in connection with such importation.¹⁴ These International legal frameworks provide the basis for Pakistan's legal standing in the Pakistan Himalayan pink salt trademark issue.

Similarly, key international treaties under WIPO strengthen the legal framework for protecting the products in international markets against misbranding. The Vienna Agreement (1973) establishes a standardized system of classifying trademarks regarding their figurative elements, ensuring that symbols, graphics, and logos may protected. Nairobi Treaty (1981) further reinforces this mechanism through prohibition of unauthorized use of emblems, symbols, colors, and trademark which are associated with a particular state and product. Then comes the Trademark Law Treaty, TLT (1994) which introduced a legal framework of simplified administrative procedure to make trademark easy to register and defendable in multiple countries without procedural barriers. In conjunction with this, the Singapore Treaty (2006) modernizes global trademark governance by incorporating digital and electronic filings, recognition systems and protection mechanisms for traditional as well as non- traditional trademarks.¹⁵ Collectively, these international treaties provide a robust international legal framework for Pakistan to assert ownership, standardize branding, curb deceptive branding and protecting from exploitation of IPs.

Several reports and articles have indicated frequent misbranding of Pakistan's Himalayan Pink salt in international markets, yet academic research studies have not explored the implications of misbranding of Pakistan's pink salt on Pakistan's salt export income generation and consumer perception regarding the authenticity of Pakistani products. Although Pakistan is the world's leading exporter of salt, the country's origin is often not acknowledged, and this natural treasure is frequently sold in international markets through unauthorized means, contributing to substantial economic loss to Pakistan. Therefore, this study will emphasize the need for effective policymaking to protect Pakistan's natural commodity, which holds significant economic potential but has received less attention.

¹⁴ "International Trademark Rights", *International Trademark Association*. Accessed on, 16 April, 2025 <https://www.inta.org/fact-sheets/international-trademark-rights/>.

¹⁵ "WIPO Administered Treaties", *WIPO*. Accessed on Oct 10, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/en/web/treaties>

Into the bargain, this research will address a critical gap in existing literature by examining an underexplored trademark dispute referred to as Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt case, contributing to a broader discourse of global trade, geographical indication, and intellectual property rights. In addition to this, the study includes World Intellectual Property Organization treaties, agreements, and conventions to broadly explain the pink salt trademark dispute under the legal international framework. In addition to this, this study will illustrate the relevance of Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt trademark issue with significant IR theories, such as liberalism, Geo-Economics theory, and Utilitarian theory, which have not been discussed in existing literature.

2.2. Research Gap:

While a substantial body of literature exists on the nutritional, geological, and commercial aspects of Himalayan pink salt, a little academic attention has been given to misbranding, origin protection and policy governance dimensions. The existing studies predominantly treat pink salt as a mineral or dietary product rather than a strategic, intellectual property, and economic asset. There is a dire absence of research that examines pink salt as a case study for policy intervention or legal protection against misbranding of Pakistani products in international markets. Hence, the study fills a significant academic and policy gap by positioning Himalayan pink salt not only as a commodity but as a test case for protecting Pakistan national heritage products through integrated legal, geo-economic and institutional measures.

2.2.1. Contextual Research Gap:

Despite the growing international popularity and demand for Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, a significant research and policy gap is existing there, concerning pink salts legal protection, its misbranding in international market, and market regulation in global trade environment. Most existing studies focus on nutritional or geological aspects of pink salt, while limited academic attention has been given to the issue of misbranding, the intellectual property dimension (particularly in relation with GI and trademark enforcement), international legal mechanism, and national policy framework. There is also limited empirical analysis on the effects of cross-border misbranding and digital marketplaces on Pakistan's salt economic interest and brand authenticity. Pakistan trade data and international research reports have shown that Himalayan pink salt has a great economic potential and its rising demand in global markets has surged its value. However, there is as systematic weakness in branding, regulatory enforcement and international recognition of pink salt as Pakistan's valuable commodity. This research is therefore necessary to bridge these

gaps by examining the intersection of misbranding of pink salt either by exports or e-commerce, trade policies and international legal framework, while evaluating Pakistan's institutional efforts to safeguard its natural heritage product. The study not only contributes to the existing knowledge but also provides a policy-oriented analysis to enhance Pakistan capacity to protect and promote, not only the Himalayan pink salt but also the unique geographic products which has true Pakistani origin.

2.2.2. Theoretical Gap:

An extensive literature exists on international trade, intellectual property rights, consumer protection, and product-origin protection but there is a lack of comprehensive theoretical integration addressing the issue of misbranding of natural commodities within a digitally oriented and globalized market structure. Most existing researches treat misbranding either a trade irregularity or legal concern, without situating it within a broader theoretical realm that captures its economic, institutional and consumer dimensions. The empirical studies published in top tier intellectual property, international trade and regulatory governance a journal such as Illinois State Bar Association, International Review of Intellectual Property and Competition Law (IIC), Trends in Intellectual Property Research, Economic and Political Weekly and reports from WIPO, The World's Trademark Association, Volza and The World Population Review highlight the need for research that connects trade competitiveness, legal enforcement, and consumer perception in terms of product authenticity. These studies remain focused on isolated aspects, such as IP law compliances, market asymmetry, or digital consumer trust however there is a need of synthesizing a unified theoretical structure. To bridge this gap, this research employs a multi-theoretical framework combining Liberal Institutionalism, Geo-economic theory, Legal Positivism and Consumer protection and Regulatory Theory. Together these theories present a coherent lens for understanding multiple dimensions of pink salt misbranding, Pakistan's legal and institutional gaps, role of international legal framework and policy recommendations to secure Pakistan's salt economic potential in international markets.

The empirical study emphasizes several future directions that are currently underexplored and justify the respective theoretical gap.

- Integrating geo-economic analysis with intellectual property enforcement to explain how the natural resources are sometimes weaponized by states and used against other states for strategic gains.
- Examining liberal institutional role of international organization such as WIPO and WTO and to assess their efficacy for protecting Ips, GIs, trademarks and states' right of ownership on unique commodities. This has been broadly explained in discussion and analysis section that how WIPO and its administered treaties and agreement successfully protected many products against counterfeiting and illegal branding practices.
- Applying legal positivism to analyze the gap between international legal obligations and domestic implementation of laws for protecting goods and services abroad from illegal market strategies.
- Exploring the interaction between misbranding, consumer perception and brand identity in international market places through false digital or real-world marketing and how international legal framework protects consumer rights.
- Studying how the consumer and intellectual property frameworks in developed nations can be leveraged by developing countries to safeguard authenticity of products
- Investigating the role of state-owned enterprises and state IP institutions in strengthening product branding and a national brand's identity in foreign markets to access economic potentials.
- Setting a policy model for other Pakistani products to be protected with their natural, national brand identity in international markets.

2.2.3. Methodological Gap:

A review of the existing empirical and policy-oriented literature reveals that there is a methodological gap in how the above discussed issues are studied, particularly in terms of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt. The nutritional or geological based research focuses on quantitative or experiment-based research while descriptive research focuses on legal approaches, international treaty analysis and export statistics without implying integrated empirical, comparative analysis and mixed-method approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan legal framework and international legal structure. Moreover, very few researches have utilized data triangulation, case-study analysis and relevant stakeholder-based qualitative data such as interviews from pink salt exporters, Pakistan Mineral and Development Corporation PMDC manager, and IPO intellectuals

to understand actuality of facts and policy making. This research also focuses on cross-platform analysis for online data scraping regarding misbranding of pink salt through platforms like Amazon and Alibaba. These methodological limitations restrict the understanding of how consumer perception is shaped and misled by branding practices and legal provisions are translated into policy enforcement outcomes.

Therefore, the current research addresses the methodological gap by proposing a multidimensional approach that combines literary data, theoretical legal analysis, qualitative interviews and digital content monitoring. This approach allows more evidence-based evaluation of misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, Pakistan's institutional and policy gaps, international consumers' perception for Pakistani brand identities, and role of international and national legal framework to protect commodities abroad. This methodological innovation brings empirical observation, theoretical analysis and legal framework together to formulate policies for protecting Pakistani originated products against false labeling in international markets that is practically actionable.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

The research contests a multidisciplinary theoretical approach, incorporating international theories such as Liberal Institutionalism, Geo-economic theory, with support from Legal Positivism, in understanding global governance of intellectual property rights (IPRs) and Consumer Protection and Regulatory Theory to understand how misbranded products cause consumer deception and brand dilution in international markets. The research is focused on the multi-dimensional, complex nature of the issue, which cannot be better explained while relying on a single theoretical lens. For Instance, Liberal institutionalism better focuses on the role of legal frameworks and international cooperation, but does not fully address states' behavior under economic motivations, which Geo-economic theory explains. Similarly, Legal positivism illustrates the operations of international legal practices, while Consumer protection and regulatory theory address the impacts of false branding on consumers' behavior in international markets. All together, these theories give a holistic understanding of economic, legal, institutional, and consumer-driven strands of the issue.

2.3.1. Liberal Institutionalism:

Liberal institutionalism is a theory in international relations that focuses on the establishment and role of international institutions in promoting peace and cooperation in an anarchic system of the world. This theory emphasizes that international institutions can promote peace by regulating norms and frameworks, mitigating anarchy, and creating rules that guide states' behavior. Realistically speaking, liberalism complemented the establishment of institutions and the prevailing calm of the second half of the 20th century. With the rise of multiple offshoots, it conceptually rehabilitated and redeemed itself, leading to the development of Liberal Institutionalism starting in the 1970s. The development of regional and international institutions in the decades following World War II rekindled "functionalist" ideas that had started to question fundamental realism principles in the 1930s.¹⁶

From a liberalist perspective, protection of Intellectual property rights and fair global trade are essential for establishing and fostering mutual economic growth. The global trade regimes like the WTO and TRIPS are built on cooperation among states and legal agreements between them. This

¹⁶ Tana Johnson and Andrew Heiss, "Liberal Institutionalism," chap. 8 in *International Organization and Global Governance*, 2nd ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson. Accessed on Sep 2, 2025. URL. <https://www.andrewheiss.com/research/chapters/johnson-heiss-2018/2018-johnson-heiss-liberal-institutionalism.pdf>

perspective highlights the importance of a rules-based global order where intellectual property rights and Geographical Indications (GIs) are protected through mutual commitments. The misbranding of Pakistani Himalayan Pink salt by foreign entities, such as India, in international markets is a counterfeit strategy that violates fair competition in global markets through deceptive means and practices. Therefore, the case study quantifies the international legal framework, GIs' protection mechanisms, and the importance of Intellectual property rights claims in protecting trademarks.

This can be understood with the help of case studies in relevance to the Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt case. World Intellectual Property Organization WIPO has quoted many significant success stories of Intellectual Property IP protection across the globe. For instance, Mondulkiri Wild Honey is marked as a radical commodity of Cambodia. The yearly production of honey in the Mondulkiri region is 70 tons. Initially, Cambodia did not have strong systems for protecting its natural commodity under Geographical Indication. WIPO provided technical assistance to the country to develop a GI Legal framework. This helped local producers secure better prices, expand into niche markets across the border, and improve the livelihoods of Cambodian people.¹⁷

Another case study is the Nadoka tea of Japan that emphasizes the role of WIPO as an international organization to protect a commodity's identity in global markets. Japan has an old tradition of producing premium trees. This tea is one of the world's oldest beverages. With its effective medicinal benefits, it has a strong market in European markets. This resulted in a large variety of teas being misbranded and traded as Nadoka Tea. Therefore, the Japan Geographical Indication Act was passed in 2015, in line with the TRIPS Agreement and WIPO-promoted standards.¹⁸ By the same token, the Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) law case study between the United States and Canada is good to be quoted. In 2008, Canada filed a case against the United States' laws, demanding original labels on beef and pork products due to consumer deception and misbranding

¹⁷ “Mondulkiri Wild Honey – A Geographical Indication from Cambodia”, *WIPO*. Oct 21, 2022. https://www.wipo.int/web/ip-advantage/w/stories/mondulkiri-wild-honey-a-geographical-indication-from-cambodia?p_1_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Fip-advantage%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dbasmati%2Brice%26category%3D288037&p

¹⁸ “NODOKA: Organic Japanese Tea”, *WIPO*. July 7, 2018. https://www.wipo.int/web/ip-advantage/w/stories/nodoka-organic-japanese-tea?p_1_back_url=%2Fen%2Fweb%2Fip-advantage%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dbasmati%2Brice&p_1_back_url_title=Search

in global markets. With the discussions by the WTO and its Appellate Body, the origin-making systems for accurate information of products were reinforced, and the dispute was settled between the USA and Canada.¹⁹

All the above-discussed cases support the Liberal institutionalism arguments that international institutions provide a framework to guide states' behavior. Although international institutions have met with criticism for being slow and dominated by powerful states that shape rules in their favor, they sometimes sideline the interests of developing nations. But, despite these shortcomings, international institutions provide a legal framework for states to protect and respect intellectual property rights in the global world. Through international institutions like WIPO, WTO, and TRIPS, states can protect their commodities in huge global markets, making an umbrella of fair trade to some extent. Thus, while these institutions are not free from flaws, they provide a platform for protecting and defending natural resources by smaller nations like Pakistan in otherwise unequal global markets.

2.3.2. Geo-economic Theory:

In today's modernized world, states' practices of power politics have evolved. The economy has become a major element of power in the international world, and how states use the economy as a strategic tool to gain an upper hand in global politics is a significant topic of discussion. International scholars and advisors started using the new term "geo-economics" to describe this kind of power politics. The author of *Coup d'État*, Edward Luttwak, in 1990, first used the term "geo-economics" in his article to describe how the international arena had shifted from military to economic power politics in post post-Cold War era. He further elaborated this idea in his book 3 years later, in 1993. This theory suggests that state power and security are not only confined to the territorial control or military projections, but also to commanding and manipulating economic means. Geo-economic theory argues that instead of a direct conflict, states sometimes use economic means to achieve their strategic goals.²⁰

¹⁹ "DS384: United States — Certain Country of Origin Labelling (COOL) Requirements", *World Trade Organization*. Dec 21, 2015. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds384_e.

²⁰ Sören Scholvin & Mikael Wigell, "GEO-ECONOMICS AS CONCEPT AND PRACTICE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS", *Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, FILA. Apr, 2018. https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/wp102_geo-economics_oikea_issn.pdf

In relevance to Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, there are several case studies which can elaborate on the idea of geo-economics. Filippo Berio is a popular international olive oil brand established in Italy in 1867. American companies import and market this olive oil in the United States. As a matter of fact, the olives for respectable oil are grown in Greece, Spain, and Tunisia. Misleadingly, American companies started branding this oil as “Made in Italy,” which led to consumer misperception. Therefore, a consumer filed a lawsuit against the American company in 2014.²¹ The American company, taking the leverage of Italian Authenticity on products for consumer perception to secure a good position in the olive oil market. This reflects how states use branding and market manipulation to capture value streams associated with any other country’s culture or assets. Another example is the Berillo Pasta Misbranding case. This Pasta was produced in North America and sold through Canada with the “NO.1 Italian Pasta” label and Italian flag. This pure misinformation created a misperception of Italian products, leading to the exploitation of Italian symbolism in international markets.²² This is an example of economic free-riding on another nation’s soft power.

Nonetheless, misbranding of Pakistan’s products in the international market can also be seen as a geo-economic competition. Taking advantage of raw salt imports from Pakistan, India has undermined Pakistan’s economic potential through selling Pakistan’s Himalayan pink salt under its tag in international markets, thus increasing India’s global market share. The state’s branding is not just commercial but also strategic, embedded in broader competition over economic narratives and national identity.

2.3.3. Legal Positivism:

Legal positivism is a modern doctrine, rooted in the political philosophies of Hume and Hobbes. It was first elaborated by Jeremy Bentham. However, significant arguments were built up by legal philosophers, H.L.A. Hart (1907–92) and Joseph Raz, and the Austrian jurist Hans Kelsen (1881–1973), who is one of the most significant architects of contemporary legal positivism. However,

²¹ Micheal R. Reese, “Food Based Country and Region of Origin Litigation”, *Illinois State Bar Association*. December 2021.

<https://www.isba.org/sections/foodlaw/newsletter/2021/12/foodbasedcountryandregionoforiginlitigation>

²² Caroline Jonnaert and Karam Stéphanie, “The Danger Of Certain Claims Of Origin: When A Commercial Strategy Is Likely To Constitute A False Or Misleading Commercial Practice”, *Mondaq*. June 10, 2024. <https://www.mondaq.com/canada/advertising-marketing-branding/1476432/the-danger-of-certain-claims-of-origin-when-a-commercial-strategy-is-likely-to-constitute-a-false-or-misleading-commercial-practice>.

the significance of legal positivism extends beyond legal philosophy. It is evident in social theory, especially in the writings of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, as well as among the majority of modern feminist scholars and American "legal realists." All of these authors believe that law is fundamentally a social phenomenon.²³

Legal Positivism asserts that enforceability and legitimacy of rights are determined by formal, legal validations rather than historical, cultural, or ethical considerations. Despite Pakistan having historical and natural claims over Himalayan Pink salt but its delayed registration under International Geographical Indication has allowed foreign entities to exploit legal gaps and Pakistan's economic rights in international markets. Legal Positivism justifies international behavior where international markets can accommodate rebranded or misrepresented goods if the rightful producer has not fulfilled the legal formalities. This theory helps to critically analyze Pakistan's weak policies to protect its product recognition in international markets. This theory also validates the importance of geographical indication for protecting commodities in global markets.

The Parma Ham Misbranding case between the UK and Italy is a significant case study in understanding legal positivism. In the late 1990s, an Italian meat-producing company sued a UK supermarket, claiming that the slicing and packaging of Parma Ham outside Parma is a violation of EU Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) rules. The European Court of Justice declared that whether Ham has authenticity and is geographically registered, slicing or packaging does not require it to occur in the Parma region.²⁴ This supports the argument of Legal positivism. In the Parma Ham case, the law was applied as it was written, despite claims of unfairness. Law was there, which had to be followed. In this scenario, according to legal positivism, if Pakistan registers pink salt as a GI under TRIPS or WIPO, its protection will be ensured even though it is a salt and it is packaged anywhere in the world.

²³ "Legal Positivism", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Jan 3, 2003. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/legal-positivism/>

²⁴ "World: Europe Italians hamstrung by UK ruling", *BBC NEWS*. Dec 1, 1998. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/225551.stm>.

2.3.4. Consumer Protection and Regulatory Theory:

Consumer Protection and Regulatory Theory suggests that consumers have the right to have true and accurate information about the products that they are being purchased by them. Misbranding, misleading, and false advertising of products can deceive consumers, which is also a violation of consumer protection law. To get deep into it, it's better to quote relevant case studies. Manuka Honey is a specialized form of honey that comes from a very rare flower from the lands of Australia and New Zealand. This honey grabs a huge potential in global markets due to its unique antibacterial properties. Its premium price in global markets is \$100/kg. However, many other countries have flooded the global markets with adulterated and counterfeit products, leading to misbranding of Manuka Honey. Due to this premium exploitation, consumers pay 5 to 10 times more money for a regular honey in the name as Manuka. New Zealand estimated a loss of about \$400 million annually due to this misbranding.²⁵

Another case study that provides validation to this theory is “U.S. Misbranding of Japanese ‘Kobe Beef’”. Kobe beef is a premium Japanese commodity, renowned for its tenderness, marbling, and production standards. Genuine Kobe beef costs \$200-400 per pound, and it is exported in limited quantities; therefore, it is expensive. The US retailers and restaurants, since the 2000s, started selling cheaper beef from the US as Kobe beef, exploiting brand reputation and consumer rights. About 78% of American consumers doubt Kobe Beef, which ultimately questioned Japanese products.²⁶ This not only violated consumers' rights but also caused damage to Japanese brands, ultimately leading to economic loss. As a result, a class action lawsuit was filed against American companies in 2016 for violating consumer rights. \$10.5 million was charged to the alleged companies for consumer funds, hence protecting and regulating consumer rights.

In Pakistan’s case, its Himalayan pink salt is being sold by India without mentioning its origin, leading to consumer deception across the world, as they are unaware of the salt’s source, origin, and quality. In contrast, Pakistan has also exhibited the Consumer Protection Act 2005, which

²⁵ Cheng, Jiehong, Guyang Zhang, Waleed Abdulla, and Jun Sun. “Advancing Fraud Detection in New Zealand Mānuka Honey: Integrating Hyperspectral Imaging and GANomaly-Based One-Class Classification.” *Food Bioscience* 60. August 2024: 104428. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fbio.2024.104428>.

²⁶ Shook Hardy & Bacon LLP, “Class action challenging source of restaurants’ ‘Kobe’ beef settled”. *LEXOLOGY*. Accessed on Sep 03, 2025. <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=509d3060-cbfb-4fae-852a-513f55f44e66>

aimed at establishing protection councils and consumer courts to protect consumer interests and rights. However, Regulatory theory emphasizes on state's role to correct such market failures by implementation and enforcement of legal norms and policies that protect producers and consumers' rights alike and prevent deceptive practices

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is focused on the misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt in international markets and its impacts on Pakistan economic potential and consumer perception about Pakistani products and brands' identity. This chapter is aimed to address the choice of research methodology in order to collect the data and findings. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the specific research designs and philosophical underpinnings of the research. Research Methodology can be defined as the general and careful study to investigate in the field of knowledge to establish a fact. Methods can be of three types: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. The research methodology involves qualitative-quantitative, mixed-method research along with exploratory-explanatory analysis. It is exploratory because there is a lack of extensive prior research on misbranding of pink salt in international markets and its policy implications. It is explanatory as it seeks to interpret the legal, institutional, and market dynamics responsible for misbranding and to propose a framework of corrective measures through legal and institutional framework. Data collection is through primary sources such as interviews from relevant stakeholders and survey from local Pakistanis, and secondary sources such as trade data, reports, case studies, legal documents, digital platforms' observation and journal articles.

3.1. Research Epistemology:

The epistemological foundation of this research sets on the principles of interpretivism, which asserts that knowledge is developed through the understanding of meanings and perceptions constructed by individuals or institutions. In context of this study, knowledge about how and why the problem exists cannot be solely derive from legal aspects or trade data. Therefore, interpretivism enables a broader exploration of how stakeholder, policymakers, exporters and IP regulators of Pakistan perceive the misbranding of Himalayan pink salt in international markets. The interpretivist research paradigm examines that misbranding of pink salt is not merely an economic or legal issue but is influenced by institutional practices, market behaviors and regulatory enforcement. Moreover, it explains that consumer perception about pink salt brand identity is affected by marketing, lack of geographical awareness and false branding on digital platforms. Likewise, weak policy frameworks and enforcement mechanisms can be understood as root causes of misbranding of pink salt and Pakistan potential economic loss due to it.

3.2. Research Ontology

However, the study's ontology aligns with relativism which refers that reality is socially constructed and is dependent on context. As Himalayan pink salt is a natural, valuable commodity and is geographically owned by Pakistan but misbranding of pink salt by countries like India and false product packaging by multiple websites online leads to exploitation of Pakistani brand identity and economic interests in international markets because consumers are misled by the information. This misbranding may construct an illegal version of authenticity through branding narrative that detach the product from its Pakistani origin. Through relativist ontology, the present study acknowledges that misbranding, economic exploitation of natural resources and consumer misperception are outcomes of overlapping realities such as institutional weakness, weak policy enforcement, and lack of effective approaches towards market dynamics.

3.3. Research Approach:

The research adopts a mixed-method research approach, with both qualitative and quantitative data using embedded numerical validation and utilizing a case study research design to explore and analyze the misbranding of Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt in global markets. The qualitative approach aimed at exploring and analyzing the underlying causes, institutional weaknesses and policy gap behind Himalayan pink salt misbranding in international markets. The study primarily follows a deductive research approach as it applies established theoretical frameworks to interpret misbranding of pink salt. Existing theories such as Geo-economic theory, Liberal Institutionalism, Legal Positivism and Consumer Protection and Regulatory Theory were used to guide the analysis of data and explain how misbranding of pink salt emerged due to weak institutional structures, inadequate legal enforcement, the importance of international consumers' perception, and how a natural commodity is used as a strategic tool to gain economic interests by one against the other state.

3.4. Research Strategy

The overall research strategy follows a qualitative, exploratory analytical, and case study research design to generate an in-depth analysis on misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, its effects on economic interests of Pakistan and international consumer perception due to false advertisement by foreign entities, institutional and policy factors contributing to it. The strategy integrates multiple qualitative methods such as document analysis, open-ended questions from stakeholders and digital observation to ensure a triangulated view of the issue.

3.5. Qualitative Sampling:

The study employs a purposive sampling technique to select participants who possess specialized knowledge about the production, regulation, exportation, and branding of Himalayan pink salt. The representatives include key stakeholders such as an official from Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation (PMDC), Pakistan Pink salt exporter, and an official from the Intellectual Property Rights Organization of Pakistan (IPO). These respondents were deliberately chosen based on their institutional roles and direct involvement in pink salt governance and export mechanism. This ensured that the data collected reflects the informed perspectives relevant to the research objectives. For primary survey regarding pink salt usage, local awareness and perception involves non-probability convenience sampling, which was deemed appropriate due to time constraints and the exploratory nature of the study. While the survey does not aim to achieve nationwide statistical generalization, it provides meaningful insights into prevailing consumer perceptions and trends to the research objectives.

3.6. Data Collection and Survey Design:

The study involves comparison, coding, and triangulation to collect, understand, and analyze the facts through documented resources. Since limited empirical work exists on intersection of issue of misbranding, international legal framework, digital misbranding, and Pakistan intellectual property governance, a qualitative approach allows for deeper analysis through Pakistan's relevant stakeholders professional perspectives. Therefore, primary data is collected through interviews from key stakeholders such as officials from Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation (PMDC), Pakistan Pink salt exporters, and officials from the Intellectual Property Rights Organization of Pakistan through 5-8 open-ended questions. Purposive Sampling (type of Non-Probability Sampling) is used in order to get specialized insights on the issue. The key informants were purposefully chosen due to their relevance to;

- Extraction, resource governance and quality control (PMDC).
- Trademark protection and regulation (IPO)
- Market dynamics, exports, actual trade practices and branding issues (Pink Salt Exporter).

The interview transcripts were analyzed through thematic coding to understand misbranding, economic impacts, legal findings, and consumer perceptions. After transcribing the interviews, key statements, core ideas, and relevant concepts were highlighted to generate initial codes manually.

These codes then identified major themes related to misbranding, institutional gaps, branding issues, market practices and export challenges.

Meanwhile, secondary data gathered from a variety of resources, including WIPO reports, UNCTAD documents, international GI legislations, case laws, news articles, and blogs, has gone through content analysis to evaluate the scope of the issue. For understanding trade data, empirical evidence, and reports, descriptive statistics have been used. More telling is, the theoretical frameworks are reflected in the structured interview protocol. Questions on state strategies to combat the issue of misbranding come under Geo-economic theory; queries for legal framework and enforcement are topics of Legal Positivism; Liberal Institutionalism reflects, prompts for international cooperation and problem of consumer misperception related to Pakistani products in international markets and policies for image building are addressed by Consumer Deception & Regulatory theory.

In addition to this, the research incorporated a primary survey to assess local awareness, usage patterns, and perceptions regarding Himalayan pink salt in Pakistan. The inclusion of primary data intends to provide an empirical support to the research argument that misbranding and weak origin recognition affect not only international markets but also domestic consumers understanding of pink salt value and authenticity. The survey was designed using Google Forms and administered to local Pakistani consumers through online circulation. A structured questionnaire was developed consisting of close ended and multiple-choice questions to ensure consistency, clarity and ease of response. The questions focused on key variables relevant to the study, including frequency of pink salt usage, awareness about its market value, perceived health and quality benefits, and consumers' understanding of pink salt misbranding issue.

A total of 140 valid responses are collected and included in the analysis. The survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, primarily frequencies and percentages, to identify consumer behavior and awareness. The findings are subsequently added into the data analysis chapter to triangulate with secondary data, legal analysis, and stakeholder interviews. This data triangulation strengthened the validity of research by linking consumer perception with documented instances of misbranding and institutional shortcomings.

3.7. Research Ethics:

The study adheres to standardized research ethics for ensuring transparency, integrity and respect for all participants and data sources. The study has been conducted according to the standardized rules and guidelines of research under Bahria University. The work is not plagiarized and sources used in the study were properly referenced and it has been done without any ghost writer. Data findings are not fabricated and citation sources have been viewed personally. Moreover, the study aims to give new insights to the topic and it is not biased. All the participants interviewed, were approached through informed consent, ensuring their full understanding for nature and purpose of the study and their voluntary participation. The interviews were conducted in a professional manner and all responses were used solely for academic purposes.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS/ RESULTS/ FINDINGS

4.1. Pakistan’s Himalayan Pink Salt: A National Treasure

Salt is perceived as a commonplace commodity which historically functioned as a strategic economic asset shaping trade routes, state revenues, and even political control. From the ancient “salt roads” of the Roman Empire to the colonial monopolies of South Asia, salt holds a steady economic importance due to its wide industrial and commercial applications. Salt is being used as a major part of diet and cuisine and its industrial and pharmaceutical make it a valuable commodity. Globally, salt production supports a large number of employment and trade, with countries earning substantial revenues from its extraction, value-added products, and exports.

Pakistan possesses some of the world’s largest salt reserves. Pink salt is a natural treasure of Pakistan. It is sometimes, termed as pink gold of Pakistan. In the foothills of Himalayas, Khewra salt mines are located which are world’s second largest salt range. From this mine, Pakistan produces 40 to 30,0000 tons of salt annually. Research has found almost 84 mineral traces in Himalayan pink salt which have good health benefits.¹ Also, products made up of this pink salt hold a unique distinction in the world that can portray Pakistan’s natural beauty, if branded correctly. Besides USA, which is one of the biggest importers of Pakistan salt, China has also been witnessed to increase Pakistan’s pink salt imports.² Moreover, Bangladesh, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine are also the growing markets for Pakistan Himalayan pink salt. This improvement is attributed to a combination of factors, including marketing campaigns, increased awareness among consumers about the health benefits of pink salt, and strong trade partnerships between international importers and Pakistani exporters.

¹ Naveed Hussain Mangi, “Exploring the unique economic potential of Pakistan’s Pink Salt”, *Diplomatic Insight*. April 18, 2023. <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/exploring-the-unique-economic-potential-of-pakistans-pink-salt/#:~:text=Pakistan%27s%20pink%20salt%20industry%20certainly,ingredient%20and%20a%20natural%20remedy>

² Mariam Raheem, “Pakistani pink salt witnesses growing popularity in Chinese market”, *Gawadar Pro*. Jul 24, 2023. <https://gwadarpro.pk/1683391951703736322/pakistani-pink-salt-witnesses-growing-popularity-in-chinese-market>

In May 2023, an American company, Miracle Saltworks Collective Incorporation has decided to invest 200 million dollars in Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt industry. The investment would be made in reserve reports, preparing feasibility, processes, construction of world class processing and upgradation of mining procedures, packaging facilities and community development programs. This company had declared that Pakistan has a great potential of earning 12 to 13 billion dollars annually from salt exports.³ In 2025, Pakistan Himalayan pink salt has been presented and promoted to various international events such as Osaka Expo, Japan. Furthermore, Chinese, Turkish and Bangladeshi delegations with Islamabad Chamber of Commerce had formulated several plans to promote pink salt industry in their respective countries. This is an immense flair to kickstart a massive economic activity. But, despite of being greater exporter of pink salt, statistics of Himalayan salt exports in 2023 have shown that Pakistan is also the greater importer of pink salt from countries like Vietnam in value-added form.⁴ In addition to this, Pakistan Khewra salts mine is also a source of great tourist attraction from across the world. It stands out as an attracting place for geologists, mining strategist, and also the historians to enjoy historical, cultural heritage of Pakistan.⁵

4.2. Economic Significance of Pakistan Himalayan Pink Salt:

4.2.1. Salt in Pakistan's Economy:

Salt plays a significant yet underutilized role in Pakistan's economy. The country hosts the second-largest salt mines in the world and is the 16th-largest salt-producing country (as of 2024).⁶ In 2023, Pakistan became the 18th largest exporter of salt to global markets, with an estimated \$75.5 million in salt exports. During the same year, salt also became the 67th most exported product out of 1129 commodities in Pakistan. The main importers of Pakistan's salt were Canada with \$8.21 million, the USA with \$19.1 million, the UK with \$6.4 million, China with \$5.92 million, Japan with \$3.57 million, and Afghanistan with \$ 944,000 in salt imports. Japan, Canada, and

³ "US leading company to invest \$200m in Pakistan Salt industry", *Radio Pakistan*. August 21, 2023. <https://radio.gov.pk/13-05-2023/us-leading-company-to-invest-200m-in-pakistan-in-pinksalt-industry>

⁴ "The Himalayan Salt Import Export Data & Importers Exporters List in 2023", *Tendata*. Sep 9, 2024. <https://www.tendata.com/blogs/import/6062.html>

⁵ Sadiq Shah, "Khewra Himalayan Salt Mine, Economic Importance and an Unforgettable Experience", *LinkedIn*. Jan 19, 2023. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/khewra-himalayan-salt-mine-economic-/>

⁶ "Salt Production by Country 2025", *World Population Review*. Accessed on Aug 18, 2025. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/salt-production-by-country?>

Afghanistan are the fastest-growing markets for Pakistan's salt.⁷ In a similar vein, Pakistan ranked as the 14th largest salt-exporting country in the world in 2024, with \$76.8 million (2% of the total global salt exports market).⁸ Most of Pakistan's salt exports are to China. From 2024 to 2025, China has become a dominant salt importer of Pakistan's salt. In 2024, the Pak-China salt trade volume was \$1.30 million.⁹ However, in the first quarter of 2025, Pakistan's salt exports to China experienced a significant increase of 33%. From January to March, Pakistan exported 13.64 million kilograms of salt to China, which contributed to \$1.83M revenue generation. From March to June 2025, Pakistan exported \$3.74 million worth of industrial salt to China.¹⁰

4.2.2. Himalayan Pink Salt: Production and Sources:

Pink Salt is valued as a delicacy due to its high food-grade quality and exceptionally unique color variations of Light Pink, Dark Pink, White, Greyish, and Red, which contain trace elements and natural minerals. It is revered as the “pink gold” of Pakistan, having great economic potential. Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt is produced in the Khewra region of Pakistan, where it has been nestled beneath the Earth's surface for over 600 million years. Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt reserves were discovered by Alexander the Great in 326 BC. Later, Himalayan salt became a sensation worldwide, and the journey began with the extrusion of salt rocks, giving incredible attention to the best quality pink salt rocks.¹¹ Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is termed as highly pure salt compared to sea salt. According to the open resources/reports and expert review video by Dr. Berg, Keto Consultant, USA, both sea and rock salts have trace minerals in them. However,

⁷ “Salt in Pakistan PK”, *The Observatory of Economic Complexity*. Accessed on Aug 15, 2025. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/salt/reporter/pak>

⁸ Daniel Workman, “Top Salt Exports & Imports by Country Plus Average Prices”. *World's Top Exports*. Accessed on Aug 18, 2025. <https://www.worldstopexports.com/top-salt-exports-imports-by-country-plus-average-prices>.

⁹ “Pakistan's salt exports to China surge 40% in Q1 2025”, *The Express Tribune*. April 21, 2025. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2541312/pakistans-salt-exports-to-china-surge-40-in-q1-2025>

¹⁰ Zafar Hussain, “Pakistan's Salt Exports to China Surge by 33% in H1 2025”. *China-Pakistan Agricultural and Industrial Information Platform*. Aug 4, 2025. <https://gwadarpro.pk/investment/1952256865052930050/pakistans-salt-exports-to-china-surge-by-33-in-h1-2025>

¹¹ “Himalayan Pink Salt: How it is Made?”, *The Smart Farm*. Jan 27, 2024. Video. URL. <https://youtu.be/BLcjhSkzjXk?si=I9xM5NRBW7G9j9Rj>

90% of sea salt products have microplastics in them as compared to rock salt. Therefore, pink salt is declared as the purest form of salt with a purity level up to 99.3% (tested by PCSIR).¹²

Himalayan pink salt is not only used for table salt as well as for culinary uses, but also to make decorative items like salt lamps, spa treatments, air purification, saunas for ambiance, candle holders, and bath items in luxury markets. Pink salt caves are huge, and the salt is extracted from huge rocks inside the caves. From the Khewra salt mines, 1000 tons of pink salt are extracted daily through hand drills, gunpowder, and pickaxes. These salt blocks are then transported through specialized trucks or cranes. Additionally, the train truck system is used to ensure the timely and effective transportation of pink salt across the country, from where it is exported to global markets. Historically, Pakistan lacked salt processing mechanism, due to which pink salt is exported to India in raw form. India then used to export it to global markets with value addition and the “Made in India” tag to pink salt products.¹³

4.2.3. Export Volume of Pink Salt:

Pakistan’s abundant natural resources are a source of pride as well as opportunities for the country. From fertile agricultural landmass to huge mineral reserves, Pakistan has great development and economic potential. Among these valuable resources is the “Pink gold” of Pakistan, the Himalayan pink salt, which holds great economic potential. Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt has gained global popularity due to its vast health benefits. It contains 84 mineral traces that make it a popular ingredient across global markets. Not only that, pink salt mines in Pakistan are also the sites for great tourist attractions due to the mines’ stunning features, such as geographical formations (stalagmite structures), salt cave explorations, and salt therapy sessions. Due to the pink salt mines’ cultural and historical significance, UNESCO declared Khewra Salt Mines a “Global Heritage Site” in 2016.¹⁴ However, despite the great potential and reserves, the exports and branding of pink salt in global markets are relatively low. Pakistan has the potential to earn US\$12 billion, but

¹² “Pink Salt”, *Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation, PMDC*. Accessed on Aug 18, 2025. <https://www.pmdc.gov.pk/pink-salt/>

¹³ “How 800 Million Pounds of Himalayan Salt Are Mined Each Year | Big Business”, *Business Insider*. Jan 31, 2021. Video. URL. https://youtu.be/h23rF0xrhTE?si=Y_V1Vn1TqO7j-XOZ

¹⁴ Naveed Hassan Mangi, “Exploring the unique economic potential of Pakistan’s Pink Salt”, *Diplomatic Insight*. April 23, 2023. URL. <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/exploring-the-unique-economic-potential-of-pakistans-pink-salt/>

its current annual export of pink salt is just US\$70 million, which is much lower than the actual potential of the country.¹⁵

The Himalayan pink salt market is increasing every year. The estimated market of Himalayan pink salt is USD 258.33 million in 2025, and it is expected to increase to USD 325.95 million by 2030.¹⁶ Most of the Himalayan pink salt exports go to China, Malaysia, and the USA. As a primary producer of pink salt, Pakistan also leads in its exports with 10,365 shipments of Himalayan pink salt, followed by the United States with 3,748 shipments, and India is in third place, with 3,173 shipments. From November 2023 to Oct 2024, Volza Pakistan Export data shows that 3,447 shipments of Himalayan pink salt were made by 387 Pakistani exporters to 1,077 buyers. This has contributed to a growth rate of 14% as compared to 2022.¹⁷

According to global statistics and data, Pakistan is the 16th largest salt-producing country with 3 million tonnes of salt production annually. Compared to it, India is the 3rd largest salt-producing country after China and the USA, with 30 million tonnes of salt production. Despite less production as compared to other countries like China, the USA, and India, Pakistan's salt (especially pink) demand for Pakistan Himalayan pink salt in global markets is high. India produces most of its salt through sea brine (70-75%). The rest comes from lake brine, subsoil brine, and rock salt.¹⁸ Whereas, Himalayan Pink salt, which is very popular in global markets and among consumers due to its purity and benefits, only comes from Khewra mines of Pakistan. That is why, despite being the greatest producers of salt, the USA, China, and India import pink salt from Pakistan at low rates and then, after value addition, sell Himalayan pink salt with their labeling and earn much higher margins from it. For instance, India bought 625 metric tons of raw pink salt from Pakistan in 2016. The rate was RS 2.98 per kg, which was an extremely low price as compared to rates in global markets. However, India, after value addition and wrapping the Pakistan Himalayan Pink

¹⁵ “Pakistan Can Earn Billions of Dollars through Export of Pink Salt: ICCL.” *The Nation*, 29 Mar. 2023, <https://www.nation.com.pk/29-Mar-2023/pakistan-can-earn-billions-of-dollars-through-export-of-pink-salt-icci>

¹⁶ “Pink Himalayan Salt Market Size & Share Analysis - Growth Trends & Forecasts (2025 - 2030)”, *Mordor Intelligence*. Accessed on Aug 18, 2025. <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/pink-himalayan-salt-industry>

¹⁷ “Himalayan Salt Exports from Pakistan” - *Volza*. Accessed 28 Jul. 2025 <https://www.volza.com/ogimages/export/h/himalayan-salt-export-from-pakistan-export-shipment.svg>.

¹⁸ Sasank Sharma, “Salt Production in India – A Complete Overview”. *Indiatlas*. Sep 29, 2024. <https://indiatlas.com/salt-production-in-india/>

salt as its product with “Made in India” tag, sold 15.09562 metric tons of pink salt to global markets such as Indonesia, Somalia, the UK, the USA, Korea, Canada, and Spain. Not only India, but countries like France and Israel also sold Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt as their product, earning economic benefits through false branding in global markets.¹⁹

Recently, demand for pink salt tiles in the United States for luxury and wellness has significantly increased. Pink salt tiles are now featured in luxury homes, boutiques, hotels, and spas. The US Wellness economy is \$1.8 trillion, and this is a great economic opportunity for Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt. According to a report of the American Institute of Architects, 62% of architects say that clients demand natural materials for wellness-centric spaces, especially salt tiles.²⁰ According to reports, the global salt therapy market size has reached \$7.87 billion in 2024, \$8.59 billion in 2025, and is expected to reach a greater level, up to \$19.05 billion by 2034. The rising demand for salt therapies for health benefits and decreasing dependencies on pharmaceutical solutions for health problems lead to significant market growth for salt, especially pink salt, due to its various health benefits.²¹ On top of that, salt therapy sessions are becoming common in the United States of America. Special room facilities are introduced to take salt therapy sessions, and it costs \$35-50 per 45 minutes.²² Furthermore, commercial salt walls are in demand in the US real estate business when constructing houses. It costs \$17-30k for 3 to 4 small rooms.²³ These are the modern-day economic doorways for Pakistan to expand its pink salt exports and industry to global markets through value-added setups and commercial planning.

4.3. Misbranding of Pakistan’s Himalayan Pink Salt:

Pakistan has a significant edge over India in salt exports due to several reasons. Indian salt contain impurities and cost of purification is very high. Pakistan’s pink salt on the other hand has proven to be pure for nutrition and has several qualities in terms of treatment, spa and other products

¹⁹ Waqas Banoori, “Pakistan can earn millions of dollars through Himalayan Pink Salt”, *The National Frontier*. March 23, 2021. https://thenationalfrontier.com/2021/03/23/pakistan-can-earn-millions-of-dollars-through-himalayan-pink-salt/?_im-zgcTNFiT=4525423007749826689

²⁰ The American Institute of Architects. Accessed on Aug 19, 2025. <https://www.aia.org/>

²¹ “Salt Therapy Market Size, Share and Trends 2025 to 2034”, *Precedence RESEARCH*. Jan 24, 2025. <https://www.precedenceresearch.com/salt-therapy-market>

²² “Salt Room Therapy Cost”, *Country Mile Salt Therapy Room*. Accessed on Aug 19, 2025. <https://upsalttherapy.com/salt-room-therapy-cost/>

²³ “How Much Does It Cost to Start a Salt Therapy Business?”, *SALT CHAMBERS*. Jun 26, 2025. <https://www.saltchamberinc.com/blog/how-much-does-it-cost-to-start-a-salt-therapy-business>

manufacturing. India is also an importer of Pakistan pink salt at very low rates. Pink salt from Pakistan was used to export as a raw stone to India with an average price of 40\$ per ton. This cheap salt, which is originated from Pakistan has been selling to global markets by India after packaging and advertising with huge amounts but without recognition of its Pakistani source. As a result, Pakistan is not benefited from its own product despite of 2556\$ million annual generated revenue. This declares that Pakistan is letting India to make billions of dollars from Pakistan treasure.²⁴

From 2019 to 2021, India had exported Pakistani Himalayan salt at \$300 per ton, using its own packaging and product name to various European countries, US, Korea Canada, UAE, Spain, and Somalia. Moreover, due to the absence of a GI tag, several foreign companies have a major share in the global market and a few of them used to sell this pink salt on Amazon for \$26.40 per 400 grams, which is almost equal to Rs. 8,000 per kilogram. However, following a strong social media campaign, Pakistan banned the export of pink salt to India and initiated the process of Geographical Indication (GI) registration. A major reason for misbranding of Pakistan's Himalayan Pink salt to the global markets by India is the raw export of Pakistani pink salt to India. Local traders used to export crude pink salt to India where the salt is rebranded, and further products are made through the salt which are advertised as "Made in India" in global markets. Furthermore, Pakistan did not take any strict actions to make Himalayan Pink salt as its geographical indication. Therefore, salt is being misrepresented in the world.²⁵

Pakistan has abundant natural reserves which are a source of great economic potential and development. From fertile land resources to large mineral reserves, Pakistan has a great array of economic growth opportunities. Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt holds position of a valuable and unique commodity which has gained a global popularity due to its taste, purity and uses in variety of products. But unfortunately, this national treasure of Pakistan is rebranded and sold by other countries, such as India, to the global markets. This misrepresentation of pink salt in global markets

²⁴ Muhammad Shazam, "The Pink Gold of Pakistan; How India is making Billions of Dollars off Pakistani Rock Salt", World Defense. March 13, 2019. <https://world-defense.com/threads/the-pinkgold-of-pakistan-how-india-is-making-billions-of-dollars-off-pakistani-rock-salt.7038/>

²⁵ "How Pakistan can Protect its Himalayan Pink Salt in International Level?", *Premier Quality Chemicals, Pvt. Ltd.* Accessed on 15 Oct 2025. <https://pqchemicals.com/how-paksitan-can-protect-itsnatural-products-in-international-level/>

has some socioeconomic implications such as loss of export revenue, brand dilution and consumers' misperceptions. In 2024, Punjab Government of Pakistan declared that currently, pink salt is being sold as \$20 per ton, while in international markets have \$10 per kilogram.²⁶ Moreover, the revenue which is being generated by India by selling Pakistani pink salt to global markets led to huge loss to Pakistan export sector. Due to lack of value addition, most of the pink salt is exported in crude or raw form and later, processed abroad such as decorative items, gourmet salt, health and beauty products. This leads to deprivation of Pakistan income potential.

An incorrectly applied "made in India" label may seem a small discrepancy to some but it implies a serious economic situation for Pakistani salt producers.²⁷ Besides this, misbranding salt is creating a brand dilution and false product perception in global markets. It questions the authenticity of Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt as it can create a distrust of labeling among consumers which can ultimately, affects the quality of Pakistan's exports to international world markets. This is also weakening Pakistan's potential to be recognized as a trusted exporter of premium goods as its signature products are being sold with other foreign labels in global markets. In 2021, a consumer class action suit was filed in Southern District Court of New York, which referred to false marketing of Pakistani Himalayan Pink salt. It discussed that consumers pay price premium for products what they perceive to be genuine and authentic specifically those, which are associated with particular places, as Pakistan's pink salt. Consumers are generally misled by fraudulent labeling of pink salt from India, which originally belongs to Pakistan. These practices are referred as geo-economic strategies used by one state against the other as argued by Geo-economic theory. India has exploited Pakistan's economic potential by taking advantage of raw pink salt imports, and selling it under the "Made in India" tag in international markets, thus increasing India's global market share. This is not just commercial but also strategic, embedded in broader competition over economic narratives and national identity.

In a similar vein, misbranding of Himalayan pink salt is also considered as a trademark issue. Trademark is termed as legal design, sign symbol, phrase or a combination of words that

²⁶ Bilal Hussain, "SMAP raises concerns over proposed ban on raw pink salt exports", *Business Recorder*. Sep 15, 2024. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40322541/smap-raises-concernsover-proposed-ban-on-raw-pink-salt-exports>

²⁷ Jacob Smith, "The Untold Truth Of Himalayan Salt", *Mashed.com*. Feb 2, 2023. <https://www.mashed.com/830128/the-untold-truth-of-himalayan-salt/>

distinguishes services and goods of one enterprise, company, brand or business from others. These trademarks act as brand recognizers or identifiers which are protected by intellectual property rights. The World Intellectual Property Organization WIPO is a specialized, international agency to advocate trademark protection and intellectual property rights across the globe. There are several trademark-related treaties which are administered by WIPO such as Paris Convention, Madrid protocol, Madrid Agreement, Vienna Agreement, Trademark law treaty, Nairobi Treaty, Singapore Treaty. All these treaties and agreements aim to protect products, items and geographical indications through standardized trademark registration procedures. Misbranding of Himalayan pink salt in global markets by India is a trademark dispute because Himalayan Pink salt is Pakistan natural treasure and the salt and it cannot be exported to global markets with “Made in India” labels which is illegal according to international law. Pakistan has recently taken steps to register its Himalayan pink salt under GI protection. If Pakistan becomes successful in registering Himalayan pink salt as its trademark, India will have to face the legal, economic as well as reputational consequences. Pakistan can freely, file lawsuits against India for misbranding its salt in global markets, demanding compensation for income losses and damaging intellectual property rights.

4.4.A Cross-Platform Review of International Websites Selling Himalayan Pink Salt:

Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is being misbranded widely, not only by foreign entities but also by several international brands and e-commerce platforms across the globe. A comparative analysis of pink salt product listings across various platforms reveals the geographic misrepresentation of a commodity and widespread false branding of Pakistan’s Pink Salt. Some of these brands acknowledge Pakistan’s origin for the salt, but most recognize Himalayan Pink Salt as their refined product. Many global retailers fail to accurately acknowledge the origin of their products in their labeling and product descriptions. Regional references, such as “Himalayas” or “Asia”, are commonly used, effectively erasing Pakistan’s provenance. This lack of recognition not only undermines Pakistan’s rightful geographic and cultural claims over the Himalayan Pink salt but also raises concerns about transparency and international law in protecting a state’s commodity in global markets.

Amazon facilitates lots of sellers to reach broader markets globally. Numerous brands on Amazon omit Pakistani reference as the origin of Himalayan Pink Salt. For instance, AROMATIKA is a renowned online brand that sells Himalayan Pink salt and its refined products. In the product

description, the brand has not mentioned any Pakistani origin.²⁸ Similarly, the Natural Health International brand writes, “Formed in the Himalayas 250 million years ago when the oceans were clean, hand mined”²⁹ in the origin section, mentioning the Himalayas as the natural and geographical origin of pink salt, without acknowledging Pakistan’s rights over it. FAIRE is an international marketplace, empowering independent retailers. The Himalayan Pink salt sellers here are in large numbers. The majority of the brands and product listings on FAIRE do not provide clear origin information, as the pink salt product thus obscures Pakistan’s right as the world’s largest producer of pink salt. While some of the brands explicitly state that Himalayan Pink salt is from Khewra Mines of the Pakistani Province, Punjab.³⁰

Regarding Indian brands, “Pride of India” is one of the leading international brands from India, offering Himalayan pink salt at high prices.³¹ This Indian brand not only misbrands Pakistan’s commodity but also shares misinformation by describing it as Himalayan Pink “sea salt,” which originates from the Khewra mines in the Pakistani province. Another Indian brand, “Rani Brand India,” falsely claims that Himalayan pink salt originates from India. Their product description and packaging often label the pink salt origin as “India”.³² This misbranding not only distorts geographical authenticity but also leads to consumer deception in international markets, undermining fair trade, transparency, and a state’s rightful recognition as a product’s origin.

²⁸ “Himalayan Salt Pink Crystal Salt 46 Oz - 100% Pure & Natural - Himalayan Salt for Good Sleep - Stress Relief - Detox Cleanse: Beauty & Personal Care,” *Amazon.com*. Accessed on, 22 July, 2025. https://www.amazon.com/Himalayan-Salt-Pink-Crystal-683D081EF44D?is_byline_deeplink=true&deeplink=C149C916-E8BA-4AF8-AAB8-80319173116B&redirect_store_id=6C16991A-4793-4AE9-B33E-683D081EF44D&lp_asin=B07P15PP8J&ref_ast_bln&store_ref=bl_ast_dp_brandLogo_sto.

²⁹ “Symphony Natural Health,” *Amazon.com*. Accessed on 22 July, 2025. https://www.amazon.com/stores/SymphonyNaturalHealth/page/6C16991A-4793-4AE9-B33E-683D081EF44D?is_byline_deeplink=true&deeplink=C149C916-E8BA-4AF8-AAB8-80319173116B&redirect_store_id=6C16991A-4793-4AE9-B33E-683D081EF44D&lp_asin=B07P15PP8J&ref_ast_bln&store_ref=bl_ast_dp_brandLogo_sto.

³⁰ *FAIRE*. Accessed on 22 July, 2025. https://www.faire.com/search?q=pink%20salt&refReqId=3dcbuw25smuf54w4hp3aaq8k7&refType=SUGGESTIONS_RECENT_SEARCHES

³¹ “Pride of India” *Amazon.com*. Accessed on July 23, 2025. <https://www.amazon.com/Pride-India-Himalayan-Enriched-Minerals/dp/B07891F37G?th=1>.

³² “Rani Himalayan Pink Salt Powder (84 Essential Trace Minerals) 64oz (4lbs) 1.81kg Pet Jar ~ All Natural: Vegan: Gluten Friendly: NON-GMO: Kosher: Indian Origin.” n.d. *Rani Brand Factory Store*. Accessed July 23, 2025. <https://ranibrand.com/products/rani-himalayan-pink-salt-powder-84-essential-trace-minerals-64oz-4lbs-pet-jar-all-natural-vegan-gluten-free-ingredients-non-gmo-indian-origin?srsltid=AfmBOoo-0yGzJXZAqkvh3biSQXLgKOVGMlyt7SogJ2sWSvTs6wA2eVLL>.

By the same token, Organic India, which is a well-known health and wellness Indian brand, markets Himalayan pink salt as an original Indian product worldwide, creating a false narrative that obscures the true source of salt.³³ Another Indian website, “Pure Indian Foods,” deliberately casts misleading suspicion on salts from Pakistan and Tibet, depicting them as merely sea salt, unhygienic, and fortified with colors. This spread a bulk of misinformation about Pakistani products in global markets, misleading global consumers and hurting Pakistan’s salt economic potential globally.³⁴ Similarly, “Nutrigrowth Store”, “Mahalaxmi Organics”, “J & J Organics”, “Goodluck Trade Link”, “Golden Bird Spice Company”, and many other online salt-selling brands of India label Himalayan pink salt as “Made in India.”³⁵ These brands are generating millions of dollars annually by selling Pakistani-originated pink salt after adding value. However, a renowned Indian brand, “Bliss of Earth,” is the only brand in India that mentions Pakistan as the source of Himalayan pink salt in its product descriptions.³⁶

Unlike Indian websites and brands, which explicitly mislabel Pakistan Himalayan pink salt as an Indian product in global markets, European brands take a subtler approach, often masking pink salt’s Pakistani origin through luxury positioning and sophisticated branding. These brands categorize Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt under luxury and wellness, emphasizing exotic narratives rather than pink salt’s original geographic identity. For instance, FAUCHON PARIS,³⁷ LA MAISON DES AROMES,³⁸ and Albert Menes³⁹ are some French online marketplaces that sell Himalayan pink salt online at competitive prices. These brands describe the salt as extracted from the Himalayan Mountains, rather than specifying its source, which may contribute to the

³³ “Pink Rock Salt,” *Organic India*. Accessed on 23 July 2025. URL. <https://organicindia.com/products/pink-rock-salt-1kg-pack?srsltid=AfmBOopfxZfWOD8-wlrwXn5G0RhsviF-fnN74H91vIkeWnXA6IRNUJ81>.

³⁴ “Pure Himalayan Pink Salt” *Pure Indian Foods*. Accessed on July 23, 2025. <https://www.pureindianfoods.com/products/himalayan-pink-salt?srsltid=AfmBOoounbGOeIsnSpugPSoYJjhroqjQuUcgQiSCkRiTplqCT3Tm6kK->.

³⁵ Exporters India.com. Accessed on July 23, 2025. <https://www.exportersindia.com/indian-suppliers/himalayan-pink-salt.htm>

³⁶ Bliss of Earth. Accessed on July 23, 2025. <https://blissofearth.com/products/pure-himalayan-pink-salt-of-pakistan-for-healthy-cooking?srsltid=AfmBOoocXerww-o0tjrDDTPXVmpE2ws4zW1v-bPg09XrQiVm75UUxDdl>

³⁷ Fauchon Paris. Accessed on July 24, 2025. https://www.fauchon.com/en/products/pink-himalayan-salt-1016250?_pos=1&_sid=203a82d75&_ss=r

³⁸ LA MAISON DES AROMES. Accessed on July 24, 2025. <https://www.lamaisondesaromes.fr/>

³⁹ Albert Menes. Accessed on July 24, 2025. <https://www.albertmenes.fr/fr/sels/392-sel-rose-himalaya-3234750030964>.

misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan Pink Salt. Similarly, the Healthy Supplies brand of the UK deliberately mentions “Mined from the foothills of the Himalaya”⁴⁰ but “Pakistan”, as an origin, is missing. These are small acts of misinformation but have huge impacts on brand identity and consumer perception.

Yet at the same time, there are a few international brands and retailers that stand out for their accuracy and transparency in labeling the origin of Himalayan Pink Salt. Brands such as Alpi Nature (Belgium),⁴¹ Himalayan Chef, Amazon (United States),⁴² and America Salt Company “Sea Salt”⁴³ explicitly mention Pakistan as the origin of Himalayan pink salt. This not only ensures traceability, brand identity protection, and consumer trust but also upholds the geographic origin integrity of a commodity in global trade.

However, the proof is in the pudding that most of the Indian salt-selling websites and brands tend to misbrand Pakistan Himalayan Pink Salt in global markets through false information and erasing Pakistan as the true source of the commodity. Through this strategy, Indian brands earn millions of dollars annually, eroding Pakistan's economic credits and brands' visibility in global markets. This can be viewed through the lens of Geo-economic Theory. The misbranding of Himalayan pink salt reveals that natural resources are not merely economic commodities but also a tool for strategic interests and competition. The mislabeling of pink salt by Indian or European brands is an example to show how states can use resources, commodities, and markets to achieve economic and geopolitical advantages. For Pakistan, this highlights the untapped potential of its salt reserves and the urgent need to adapt geo-economic strategies such as GI protections, trade diplomacy, and brand marketing to transform a raw resource (salt) into a source of strategic influence in the global economy.

⁴⁰ Healthy Supplies. UK. Accessed on July 24, 2025. <https://www.healthysupplies.co.uk/index.php?subframe=page&pagename=himalayan-rose-pink-salt-fine-sussex-wholefoods-500g&searchphrase=PINK+SALT&searchfrom=0&searchto=50&sortby=>

⁴¹ Alpi Nature, Amazon. Com. Accessed on July 24, 2025. <https://www.amazon.com.be/-/en/Himalayan-Coarse-Crystal-Khewra-Pakistan/dp/B09129GJSG>.

⁴² Himalayan Chef. Accessed on July 24, 2025. <https://wbminternational.com/product/pink-salt-fine-5>

⁴³ SALTWORKS, America. Accessed on July 24, 2025. <https://seasalt.com/ancient-ocean-fine-zip-top-pouch>.

4.5. Pakistan Weak Strategies to Protect Pink Salt:

The above discussion has revealed that pink salt is being misbranded through several channels and foreign entities through strong marketing, branding and value-added packaging. Several external actors' market pink salt with their own tags, without authentic information or majorly false information about source and origin. It is clear that countries like India, France, other European countries and their national and international digital websites are responsible for misbranding of pink salt in international markets, leading to significant economic loss to Pakistan. However, weak institutional structures, lack of legal enforcements and poor packaging and branding for pink salt within Pakistan is the root cause. Pakistan efforts to protect its natural resources in international markets have remained fragmented. The mining and production of pink salt is at not-so-good level. There is lack of a strong national packaging and branding policy for protecting and promoting pink salt. There is absence of a standardized national trademark which has to be registered abroad. Although, GI Act was enacted in 2020 but slow implementation and persisting lack of international recognition made the false branding of pink salt incessant. The little progress towards international consumer protection and legal awareness and assistance hindered pink salt industry to grab a full economic potential. These uncoordinated institutional mechanisms, delayed legal approaches such as trademark registration, international recognition of GI and consumer protection through effective means resulted a significant revenue loss to Pakistan annually.

The theory of Legal Positivism emphasizes on the presence of strong legal validations to protect a commodity against misbranding in international markets. Legal Positivism asserts that enforceability and legitimacy of rights are determined by formal, legal validations rather than historical, cultural, or ethical considerations. Despite Pakistan having historical and natural claims over Himalayan Pink salt but the delayed legal steps have allowed foreign actors to exploit Pakistan's economic rights in international markets. Legal Positivism justifies international behaviour where international markets can accommodate rebranded or misrepresented goods if the rightful producer has not fulfilled the legal formalities. This theory helps to critically analyse Pakistan's weak policies to protect its product recognition in international markets. This theory also validates the importance of geographical indication for protecting commodities in global markets. If Pakistan cannot build its own trademark brand for pink salt and make it GI recognized in international markets, countries like India and France would continue to misbrand Pakistan

Himalayan pink salt and earn huge market shares. Therefore, Pakistan needs strong and effective institutional, legal, and branding strategies to counter these illegal practices.

4.6. Pink Salt Misbranding and International Consumer Perception:

The idea of consumer protection and product liability has been a long-debated topic in common laws, commentaries, and Judicial developments. The place of manufacturing, origin of product, and its impact on consumers' preferences are rising points of attention in international laws, Business and marketing studies, and business literature. It is sometimes referred to as "Country-of-origin-effect" COE, which is commonly defined as an influence of product origin, either positive or negative, on the subsequent behavior of the consumer. While purchasing a product, consumers depend on the information that is shown on the packaging, warranties, brand name, or website information.⁴⁴ Many international consumers prefer Himalayan pink salt from Pakistan in their diet over white sea salt. This has driven up demand for Pakistani Himalayan pink salt in global markets. But Himalayan pink salt is often packaged and branded with a lack of true origin information by countries like India and France. Many products use the 'Himalaya' tag as an origin rather than 'made in Pakistan'. Due to this misbranding, many consumers are unable to identify the true origin of the product, creating a significant trust issue for Pakistani products. This ambiguity of misbranding has led to several consumer lawsuits in markets.

In 2021, a consumer filed a lawsuit against an American Multinational company, Costco Wholesale Corporation, for labeling Pakistani Himalayan pink salt as Himalayan pink salt of India. Costco marketing for Pakistan Himalayan pink salt gave consumers the impression that pink salt originates from the foothills of the Himalaya in Tibet and Nepal, and it is a popular commodity in India. The lawsuit was filed for misleading consumers about a product's true origin.⁴⁵ Similarly, in February 2025, the Food Authority of the Republic of Azerbaijan reported falsely advertised products of the Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt. Some sellers tried to counterfeit the commodity with

⁴⁴ George Elliot & Ross Cameron, "Consumer Perception of Product Quality and the Country-of-Origin Effects", *Journal of International Marketing*. Vol 2, No. 2. Nov, 1993. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25048542>

⁴⁵ Corrado Rizzi, "Kirkland Signature Ground 'Himalayan' Pink Salt Is Mislabeled, Class Action Claims [DISMISSED]". *Class Action. Org.* Oct 11, 2021. <https://www.classaction.org/news/kirkland-signature-ground-himalayan-pink-salt-is-mislabeled-class-action-claims>.

Iran as the origin. The Azerbaijan food agency published an advisory for pink salt consumers about misbranding and false information.⁴⁶

Another example is Darjeeling Tea, which grows in high-altitude regions of West Bengal, India. This tea is highly valued for its unique flavor and terroir. This tea grows in special climatic conditions, and its small yields lead to high demand in international markets.⁴⁷ Darjeeling Tea has long been a subject of misbranding and counterfeiting by countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Kenya. Tea often mixed with cheap teas and branded as Darjeeling is a source of consumers' misperception about the product, which potentially affects product quality and brand identity. Therefore, the Indian administration decided to establish strong brands for Darjeeling tea to protect it from being falsely branded. In 2024, the Indian Food Safety and Standards Authority mandated the accurate testing of tea before exporting it to global markets.⁴⁸

Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee is considered one of the world's best coffees due to its mild taste and lack of bitterness, making it highly-priced in the global markets. However, this coffee is misbranded in the U.S. and in countries in Asia, damaging a huge Jamaican economic potential. Reports have shown that almost 80% of international consumers of Blue Mountain Coffee are misled due to false advertising of the coffee.⁴⁹ This not only damages a country's brand identity but also violates consumers' rights. Therefore, many retailers were kept under scrutiny due to a lawsuit filed by several consumers after the Jamaican Administration's investigation on misbranding.

4.6.1. Country-of-Origin Effect (COE):

The Country-of-Origin, COE, is a phenomenon that refers to the influence of a country's product on consumers' perception, purchase intent, and product evaluation. COE is not just about the place

⁴⁶ “Counterfeit Products have been detected in Himalayan Pink Salt”, *SDS DIGICOMPLY*. Feb 27, 2025. <https://www.digicomply.com/food-safety-incidents/counterfeit-products-has-been-detected-in-himalayan-pink-salt>

⁴⁷ Bruce Richardson, “What's Special About Darjeeling Tea”, *The Tea Maestro*. Dec 13, 2010. <https://theteamaestro.com/2010/12/13/darjeeling/>.

⁴⁸ “State to set up a task force lab to protect Darjeeling Tea”, *The Times of India*. May 20, 2025. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/state-to-set-up-task-force-lab-to-protect-darjeeling-tea/articleshow/121276778.cms>.

⁴⁹ Brigette Honaker, “Is All Blue Mountain Coffee from Jamaica?”, *TOP CLASS ACTIONS*. May 17, 2019. <https://topclassactions.com/lawsuit-settlements/consumer-products/beverages/is-all-blue-mountain-coffee-from-jamaica>.

where a product is manufactured but also its geographical origin, cultural associations, and sometimes symbolic values. In consumer psychology and marketing, the Country-of-Origin Effect functions as an extrinsic cue, as consumers are unable to test the product directly.⁵⁰ Han C. M. gave a theory of Halo Effects and Summary Construct. Halo effect refers to a consumer's perception of a country's product when the consumer has no long and direct experience with the product. While the summary construct theory indicates that consumers develop a long-lasting and durable perception of a product and the country from which it originates or is manufactured.⁵¹ Applying this theory in the pink salt context, if Pakistan remains unable to protect its valuable commodity from misbranding in global markets by countries like India, global consumers may develop a strong image in the near future that the highly pure salt with vast health benefits is a valuable commodity from India and not from Pakistan. This will further become a nuisance if Pakistan finally decides to create a strong international brand. COE explains how misbranding affects authenticity and trust for a product and shifts credibility away from the true source.

4.7. Local Consumer Awareness and Perception in Pakistan: Survey Findings

A primary survey was conducted among 140 local Pakistani consumers regarding Pakistan Himalayan pink salt. The purpose of this survey was to assess consumption patterns, awareness of origin, awareness of brand and value and understanding of misbranding of pink salt in international markets among local Pakistani salt consumers. Based on the responses, 59.9% Pakistanis consume white salt while only 40.1% use pink salt in their daily life. It shows that despite being a valuable commodity, Himalayan pink salt has a measurable presence among local consumers. Among respondents who reported consuming pink salt, the most common reason of preference was the belief in health benefits. 52.9% respondents claim to prefer pink salt for its health benefits. If we make a comparison between local and international consumers, there is a big difference on awareness about pink salt nutritional and health claims. As pink salt is being marketed as one of the purest salts with great health benefits in international markets, international consumers prefer pink salt as a part of their daily diet, therapy and wellness. However, the survey shows that only 20.4% of Pakistanis are much aware about pink salt nutritional value. While 32.6% are somewhat aware about it and 17.5% respondents were not aware at all.

As discussed earlier, branding, packaging and origin effect shapes consumers' perception

regarding a product. According to the primary survey, only 10.4% respondents prefer pink salt due

to its packaging and branding. While 45.3% prefer only for benefits, regardless of premium packaging or raw condition. Additionally, the question about pink salt international market value awareness among Pakistanis declare that only 38.2% respondents are aware of pink salt international market value and misbranding while 61.8% were unaware. While the question about public opinion that what gives a product more value suggests a multidimensional view of respondents, influenced by both intrinsic and external branding or marketing signals. 45.3% respondents choose quality and origin as a variable to give pink salt a great product value, 38% believe in all, quality and origin, marketing and packaging, foreign branding and price. While 8% claimed marketing and packaging as a necessary variable in giving a product great value.

Overall, the survey data indicates that;

- White salt remains the common salt in Pakistan, despite the fact that pink salt has a great international market.
- Those who tend to use pin salt so far is due to perceived health benefits.
- Consumers purchase decisions are influenced not just by product features but also by branding and packaging, showing that marketing strategies matter in addition to health perceptions.
- Awareness of international economic value of pink salt is mixed, which aligns with broader theme of limited consumer familiarity with its global market role.
- Local perceptions of product value are multifaceted, which may reflect broader trends in how consumers evaluate quality, origin, and marketing.

4.8. International Legal Framework on Misbranding and Consumer Protection:

The disappointed consumers have pushed legislatures and courts into an agitated activity over the last decade. In the common law, the phrases “product Identity”, “Consumer Rights”, and “Consumer Protection” have evoked many judicial developments. That is the reason many countries are now establishing and introducing consumer protection laws in their national laws, according to which consumers can file lawsuits against misbranding, misrepresentation, and false advertising of products in markets. Though the debate is new, the law has existed for a long period of time. In 1977, the Virginia General Assembly passed the Virginia Consumer Protection Act (VCPA) to promote ethical and fair standards of dealings between suppliers and consumers. Article 200 (A) of this law deals with the misbranding of the source, sponsorship, or certification of

⁵⁰ Mikael Andehn, Alexei Gloukhovtsev, & John Schouten, “The Country Of Origin Effect – Key Issues And Future Direction”, *Research Gate*. July 2016.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305473373> The Country Of Origin Effect - Key Issues And Future Direction

⁵¹ Candace L. White, “Brands and national image: An exploration of inverse country-of-origin effect”, *Research Gate*. May 2012.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263326140> Brands and national image An exploration of i nverse country-of-origin effect

products.⁵² This highlights that U.S. state laws recognize misbranding as consumer harm and protect consumers from false advertising. This strengthens the case of the Pakistan Himalayan pink salt case internationally.

The above-discussed law is just an example of how the world is seeing the misbranding of a product by sellers or exporters. The International Legal framework provides a broader picture. In the increasingly globalized marketplace, international law plays a crucial role in protecting consumer rights and countries from economic losses caused by misbranding by other countries. The World Trade Organization, TRIPS Agreements, Paris Convention, the Codex Alimentarius, and the Madrid Agreement provide a legal basis for preventing misbranding, false indications of origin, and misleading labeling. These international instruments not only protect the cultural and economic value of a product but also ensure the flow of truthful information to consumers. This argument is supported by the theory of Liberal Institutionalism that focuses on the establishment and role of international institutions in promoting peace and cooperation by regulating norms and frameworks, mitigating anarchy, and creating rules that guide states' behavior. Realistically speaking, liberalism complemented the establishment of institutions and the prevailing calm of the second half of the 20th century. Although, international institutions and international legal framework has failed in protecting humanity against human rights violations but economic cooperative perspective of Liberal Institutionalism can be validated through several case studies (being discussed further).

4.8.1. The International Regulations of GIs:

Geographical Indication GIs are the signs or names related to the geographical origin of the goods or commodities. GIs are not only effective in protecting a good from misbranding in international markets but also lead to a correct perception of consumers towards a country's products. Therefore, GIs identify a wide variety of products, with particular characteristics and places where they come from. GIs are protected by national laws, trade laws, common laws, or consumer protection laws of a state. Though GI protection laws are in place, many states, organizations, or companies await a breakthrough. This issue has been addressed by several notable treaties, such as the Paris

⁵² Marshall S. Shapo, "A Representational Theory of Consumer Protection: Doctrine, Function and Legal Liability for Product Disappointment", *Virginia Law Review*. Vol 60, No. 7. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1072403>.

Convention 1883, Madrid Agreement 1891, Codex Alimentarius 1963, and the TRIPS Agreement 1994.⁵³

4.8.2. Paris Convention, 1883:

Paris Convention, administered by the World Intellectual Property Organization WIPO was adopted in 1883 and has been revised multiple times till 1979. It applies to a wide variety of intellectual property such as industrial designs, patents, trademarks, service marks, utility models, trade names, GIs, and repression of unfair competition. According to the Paris Convention, there are four ways to protect GIs, which define the conditions and scope of protection.

- Sui generis system (a special legal framework that protects special intellectual properties that don't fit into existing IPs).
- Use of Certification marks for GIs.
- Administrative product approval schemes by governments.
- Unfair competition laws.

Article 10 of the Paris Convention prohibits false GI representation and misbranding. This reflects the violation of the international legal framework in the case of the misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt as Indian salt in global markets. Similarly, Article 10bis of the Paris Convention defines these practices as illegal and unfair competition due to false advertising and branding.⁵⁴ As countries like India misbrand Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt in global markets, deceiving consumers and diverting unjust economic benefits. Therefore, it is considered a violation of Pakistan's product reputation, brand identity, and heritage according to international law. The Paris Convention requires each country to provide effective legal measures to protect goods and commodities. It also allows states to seize goods at import or export if it is misbranded. Furthermore, the Paris Convention gives member states the right to penalize fraudulent cases of misbranding under competition laws and consumer protection laws.

⁵³ Stefania Fusco, "Geographical Indications: A Discussion on the TRIPs Regulation After The Ministerial Conference of Hong Kong", *Marquette Intellectual Property Law Review*. June 2008. Vol 12, Issue 2. <https://scholarship.law.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1113&context=iplr&>.

⁵⁴ "Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property", *World Intellectual Property Organization*. Accessed on Sep 22, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/paris/>

4.8.3. Madrid Agreement 1891:

The Madrid Agreement on Repression of False and Deceptive Indications of Source of Goods was designed to deal with the misbranding of products in cross-border trade. According to this agreement, any product that has a false branding or country of origin is missing or misleading, should be banned and seized upon importation, or such importations are prohibited, or sanctions must be applied on such importations. Unlike the Paris Convention, which provides a legal framework to states for protecting IPs, the Madrid Agreement provides a source of legal penalties in the form of sanctions if a state violates the principles. Article 1 of the Madrid Agreement prohibits the false branding of products, whether the trademark is involved or not. Article 3 prohibits states from importing goods that bear false indications. Article 4 allows civil or criminal penalties against those who are involved in misbranding according to the states' domestic laws or international law.⁵⁵

Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is a subject of misbranding by countries like India in global markets. India, while indicating Himalayan pink salt as a “Made in India” product, misleading consumers and earning illegal economic benefits from Pakistan’s products, is engaged in deceptive market practices. As per international laws, Pakistan has a great stance to validate its position of securing pink salt in global markets. Under WIPO and the Madrid Agreement, Pakistan can ask for a penalty for its huge economic loss for several years due to the illegal trade of pink salt by India. Though enforcement is governed by the TRIPS Agreement, the Madrid Agreement remains a strong historical initiative to illustrate how long the international community has recognized the effects of origin misrepresentation and unfair competition.

4.8.4. Codex Alimentarius 1963:

Codex Alimentarius Commission CAC established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Food Programme in 1963, adopted collective standards, guidelines, and codes, commonly known as “Food Codes”, to promote fair practices in global trade. This codex not only provides standards for food safety and consumer health but also ensures the prohibition of adulteration, false branding, and deceptive origin claims.⁵⁶ The labeling

⁵⁵ “Madrid Agreement for the Repression of False or Deceptive Indications of Source on Goods”, *World Intellectual Property Organization*, Accessed on Sep 22, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/madrid/>

⁵⁶ “CODEX ALIMENTARIUS- International Food Standards” Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Accessed on Sep 22, 2025. <https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/en/>

guidelines of Codex Alimentarius stress that food products must not be present in a way that can mislead consumers about composition, quality, and origin. Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, produced and mined in Pakistan under unique geographical conditions, is labeled as an Indian product, which is a violation of Codex Alimentarius principles. Since Codex standards are recognized by the WTO, Pakistan can invoke these in trade disputes, challenging misbranding practices. Codex Alimentarius not only protects consumers but also provides a strong international legal framework that could strengthen Pakistan's legal standings against the misbranding of pink salt in global markets.

4.8.5. TRIPS Agreement:

Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights TRIPS is a binding agreement of the World Trade Organization WTO. It sets global standards for protecting Intellectual Property Rights IPR, trademarks, Geographical Indications, and patents. The protection of GIs in the realm of the TRIPS Agreement has emerged as the most contentious IPR issue. Article 22 of the TRIPS Agreement gives protection for GIs and the purpose of the agreement. According to this article, member states are bound to adopt legal measures if they find someone breaching the GI's legal standing in international law. If a country, organization, or company misbrands a good or a commodity and indicates any geographical area other than the true source of the good. In that case, it shall be subject to legal action by WTO member states.⁵⁷

Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is produced and mined in the Khewra mines of Punjab, holding a special geographical status. Many foreign salt-exporting companies, such as Indian and French, present pink salt as Indian, French, or just Himalayan, which is misleading information. The TRIPS Agreement protects all those products that are geographically associated with a specific country. This can be understood with the help of a case study. The European Union has long protected wine names, GIs, and trademarks in international markets. Prosecco wine is a special wine that comes from a small village in Italy. The EU has registered it as a GI because this sparkling wine is a product of special grapes. Australia is a great exporter of these grapes, making Prosecco wine locally with an Australian tag. The Australian winemakers challenged the EU registration of

⁵⁷ “Part II — Standards concerning the availability, scope and use of Intellectual Property Rights”, *World Trade Organization*. Accessed on Sep 22, 2025. https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/31bis_trips_04b_e.htm#3

Prosecco in the WTO, considering it as a grape variety rather than a Geographical indication. Article 23 of the TRIPS Agreement gives special protection to wines, indicating that the use of the GI name of a commodity by non-origin states is a misbranding act.⁵⁸ This declares that the TRIPS Agreement provides a robust legal framework for protecting GIs in the international arena. Just as Prosecco wine contributes a billion dollars to the EU, Himalayan pink salt is valuable for Pakistan. Allowing misbranding dilutes pink salt market value, while GI protection can help Pakistan improve its brand identity and economic revenue.

4.8.6. International Treaties on Protection of Trademarks:

In the modern global marketplace, where branding shapes consumer perception and trade identity, international treaties are there to serve as a legal backbone for safeguarding intellectual properties, geographical indications and trademarks across borders. Many of these treaties, establish coherent rules to prohibit the unauthorized use and imitation of unique products, goods and services of any country. The Vienna Agreement 1973 is an international legal framework for protecting intellectual properties in international world. It is administered under WIPO and had established an International Classification of Figurative Elements of Marks. This agreement provides an internationally standardized system which is known as Vienna Classification. The legal structure categorizes and protect figurative elements such as logos, visuals or graphics of a special product. Under this agreement, all type of signs used in trademarks are protected. The purpose of the Vienna Agreement is to protect and simplify trademark searches and prevent confusion or duplication of marks that contain similar visual symbols.⁵⁹

In terms of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, the Vienna Agreement holds an important implication in combating misbranding and false labeling. Many foreign companies (Notably in India and other markets) use visual branding elements such as Himalayan mountains, crystal imagery etc., but brand pink salt as their own product rather than mentioning its true source, Pakistan to create a false impression. By registering Pakistan's official pink salt trademarks and logos, for example Khewra mines symbol, Pakistan iconic logos, colors and cultural symbols under Vienna

⁵⁸ "Sour grapes: Prosecco decision could impact EU trade with Australia", *Monash University*. July 16, 2019. <https://www.monash.edu/news/articles/sour-grapes-prosecco-decision-could-impact-eu-trade-with-australia>.

⁵⁹ "The Vienna Agreement- FAQs", *WIPO*. Accessed on Oct 9, 2025. https://boss.cen.eu/media/CEN/ref/va_faq.pdf

Classification, Pakistan Intellectual Property Organization and exporters can protect pink salt with figurative elements packaging. This not only challenge counterfeit marketing but also strengthen evidence for international trademark disputes by showing registered ownership

Nairobi Treaty also has a similar impact. Nairobi Treaty on protection of Olympic Symbol was adopted in 1981 in Nairobi, Kenya. It is also WIPO administered treaty which has a primary objective to protect symbols. It ensures the exclusive rights of ownership and association of the symbols against unauthorized commercial use by third party. The Nairobi Treaty is significant to prevent commercial misappropriation and false association.⁶⁰ Although Nairobi Treaty specifically concerns Olympic Symbol but it offers an instructive precedent for Pakistan Case. The treaty demonstrates how a visual or cultural emblem or symbol, associated with a particular origin can receive an international legal protection from exploitation. Pakistan can draw upon similar principle to develop and protect a distinctive identity of Himalayan pink salt. If Pakistan Himalayan pink salt has a unique certification or symbol, registered under WIPO, it would be a great approach against misbranding.

Adding to this perspective, the Trademark Law Treaty (TLT) is also an example. TLT was adopted in 1994 under the administration of WIPO in Geneva. The treaty refers to standardization and simplification of national and regional trademark registration. To make this procedure less complex, TLT involves three provisions;

- Easy system of application for registration trademarks.
- Changes in the registration.
- Renewal of registration (mainly 10 years period).⁶¹

Under TLT framework, Pakistan could more easily register its official trademarks for Himalayan pink salt across several international jurisdictions using standardized documents and procedures. When a foreign company attempts to export salt under a false label, Pakistan trademark records

⁶⁰“Nairobi Treaty on the Protection of the Olympic Symbol”, *WIPO*. Accessed on Oct, 09, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/en/web/treaties/ip/nairobi/index>

⁶¹“Summary of the Trademark Law Treaty (TLT) (1994)”, *WIPO*. Accessed on Oct 10, 2025. https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/tlt/summary_tlt.html

(recognized under TLT) would provide a solid base for legal opposition and cancellation of infringing marks, sometimes with a penalty.

In the same vein, The Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademarks is a multilateral intellectual property treaty administered by WIPO, adopted in 2006. The main purpose of the treaty is to modernize and harmonize trademark registration systems, ensuring efficiency, greater consistency, and transparency in global trademark administration system. The Singapore Treaty is based upon earlier frameworks like Paris Convention and TRIPS Agreement. This treaty includes;

- Simplified filing and recognition of electronic and digital filing systems to support online applications.
- Uniform administrative procedures to make trademark registration easier.
- Broader protection to not traditional trademarks such as colors, logos, graphics, and sounds.⁶²

In case of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, Singapore Treaty provides a strategic legal pathway to enhance international trademark protection and its enforcement. Through standardized procedures introduced by treaty, pink salt producers, exporters and pink salt relevant departments in Pakistan can efficiently register Himalayan pink salt trademarks in international markets. This treaty also suggests online registration and protection mechanisms for trademarks so, Pakistan can move towards a digital IP governance system. Pakistan can protect its commodities and their trademarks with a single international application by linking trademark database to WIPO. The Singapore Treaty lay a foundation for Pakistan legal framework regarding quick registration of pink salt in multiple country, maintain a digital record ownership and preventing counterfeiters from falsely branding the products in order to deceive global consumers.

4.8.7. Consumer Protection Models:

Misbranding, especially when it involves false claims of origin, not only misleads consumers in international markets but also undermines the economic interests of the country that is the true source of the product. In this regard, consumer protection laws lay a foundation for ensuring truthful marketing of a product so that consumers may not be deceived about its quality,

⁶² “Singapore Treaty on the Law of Trademarks”, *WIPO*. Accessed on Oct 10, 2025. <https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/singapore/>

composition, or origin. In the case of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, Indian illegal marketing practices are an example of unfair trade in international markets. International legal frameworks such as the TRIPS Agreement, the Paris Convention, Codex Alimentarius, and the Madrid Agreement, along with domestic consumer protection models, provide legal tools to prevent such practices.

We have a few examples of consumer protection laws. US Code 1125 is a primary US statute for protecting consumers from deceptive origin information of a product. This act protects US citizens from any kind of commercial advertising or promotion that misrepresents the quality or geographical origin of any good or service. This act also provides jurisdiction against any country or any nongovernmental entity that is involved in misleading its consumers. Such states or companies are subject to civil action. Through this act, the United States also banned any importation of misbranded products. However, Section C of the act emphasizes the need for a trademark by the true source or origin. If the trademark of the owner country has a legitimate recognition and its product is misbranded by any other person, company, or state in the United States, then the owner is liable to take any civil action.⁶³ If Pakistani products have national trademarks, it would be plausible for Pakistan to claim legal actions according to the US consumer protection laws if India misbrands pink salt, misleads American consumers, and harms Pakistan's economic interests.

By the same token, EU Regulation 1152/2012 sets an example of how states can enact domestic consumer protection laws to protect their goods and products' trademarks from infringement. This act, also known as the "Quality Scheme Regulation is a legal framework of the European Union to protect agricultural and food items linked to specific geographic areas from misbranding in global markets. This act established three designations.

- Protected Designation of Origin, PDO.
- Protected Geographical Indication, PGI.
- Traditional Specialty Guaranteed, TSG.

⁶³ "15 U.S. Code § 1125 - False designations of origin, false descriptions, and dilution forbidden", *Cornell Law School*. Accessed on Sep 30, 2025. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/15/1125>.

PDO protects products at all stages of production, processing, and packaging in a special geographic area. PGI requires only one stage, production in a particular geographic area. While TSG protects special, traditional recipes irrespective of geographic limits. This act protects the product from evocation, imitation, and misuse, and protects consumers from any kind of misbranding for the products they are purchasing. This not only enhances consumer rights but also promotes fair trade and preserves the geographic and cultural heritage of goods from where they originate.⁶⁴ For Pakistan, this regulation is important because if it registers Pakistan's Himalayan pink salt in the EU as GI, it would be legally shielded from Indian attempts to misbrand it in one of the world's largest markets.

In 2024, the EU Regulation 1152/2012 is amended with a new GI protection reform called “Bird & Bird, EU Regulation 2024/1143”. This legal reform not only protects the products from on-ground misbranding practices but also the online platforms. The European Commission and EUIPO established an online mechanism to prevent products from false branding right at the door of online submission to sell. This online model created an alert system that verifies a product's name, origin information, and identifies online misbranding practices. This legal framework also gives broad rights to rightful producers to defend their GIs within the EU.⁶⁵ This is considered a modern legal reform as the world has become digitalized. Many Pakistani Himalayan pink salt products are sold through e-commerce and are frequently misbranded. This reform gives Pakistani pink salt producers and exporters a stronger tool to demand checks and balances of domain names and to challenge online misbranding practices.

4.9. From Mines to Markets: Pakistan's Efforts in Pink Salt Development:

The Himalayan pink salt industry has witnessed a notable increase in the past 5 years. The grain pink salt is transforming into premium and gourmet products as demand in developed markets increases, where consumers are upgrading from ordinary table salt to special salt varieties. Therefore, diversification and product innovation are the demands of the day in global markets.

⁶⁴ “Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 November 2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs”, *EUR-Lex, European Union*. Accessed on Sep 30, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2012/1151/oj/eng>

⁶⁵ “The reform on the protection of geographical indications in the European Union: The European Parliament and Council adopted the new Regulation”, *Bird & Bird*. April 29, 2024. https://www.twobirds.com/-/media/new-website-content/insights/pdfs/bird-bird-alert_the-reform-on-the-protection-of-geographical-indications-in-the-eu.pdf.

Quality assurance, along with the authenticity of the product, has emerged as a critical concern in the industry. Over the past few years, Pakistan's government and private sectors have taken the initiative to strengthen the pink salt industry.

Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation PMDC, under the administrative role of Ministry of Energy and Petroleum Division, is an autonomous body of Government of Pakistan. It was established in 1974 to help mineral development in Pakistan. PMDC is involved in exploration of minerals and evaluation of economic mineral deposits, mining and marketing, and establishment of technological advancement and mineral economy of Pakistan. In 2002, Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation, PMDC, launched a project "Khewra Salt Mines Resort Development" to transform mines into tourist-friendly sites, such as resorts, lighted caves and walkways, electric trains, souvenir shops, reception halls, and food points. It cost 4.3 million for resort establishment and further 3 million for maintaining quality. Each year, these pink salt resorts drive more than 2.5 lakh visitors from all around the world, contributing a significant revenue to Pakistan's economy.⁶⁶ According to GI Act 2020, PMDC has declared as the only relevant public institution as "Registrant" for Geographical Indication.

In 2021, after the outbreak of a social media campaign against the misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan Pink salt by countries like India and France in global markets, Pakistan decided to register Himalayan pink salt as a Geographical Indication (GI), to prevent unauthorized use of pink salt by any country.⁶⁷ In addition to this, the Pakistan government in 2021 made the Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation (PMDC) a registrant agency for rock salt to register pink salt under GI.⁶⁸ During the same year, Pakistan deposited its formal accession document for Madrid Agreement to WIPO's Director General. Being 108th member of the Madrid System, Pakistan can enforce laws to protect its products and trademarks in international markets against misbranding. Pakistani local brand owners can seek trademark protection through the Madrid System in all other

⁶⁶ "Tourist Resort", *Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation*. Accessed on Aug 20, 2025. <https://www.pmdc.gov.pk/tourist/>

⁶⁷ "Pakistan to register Himalayan pink salt as Geographical Indications", *The Tribune India*. Feb 19, 2021. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/pakistan-to-register-himalayan-pink-salt-as-geographical-indications-214669>

⁶⁸ "Pakistan to apply for GI tagging of its Khewra rock salt", *SOUTH ASIA MONITOR*. Apr. 30, 2021. <https://www.southasiamonitor.org/pakistan/pakistan-apply-gi-tagging-its-khwera-rock-salt>

123 member states. Besides member states, Pakistan can also file applications for product and trademark protections to those countries which are not part of the Madrid Agreement.⁶⁹

On 1st April 2021, Salt Manufacturer Association of Pakistan SMAP was established by commencing interactions of with the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan TDAP, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce, and also the Planning Division of Government of Pakistan. Under SMAP, salt and related industries gathered in one roof, promoting country's economic potential and business interests. SMAP collects and publishes data on salt industry, that is being further used by policy makers and government. SMAP also identifies issues of misbranding and false advertisement in international markets. Additionally, it lobbies the government for policy matters on salt industry of Pakistan. For instance, after Pakistan India conflict of 2019, Pakistan had put a ban on trade with India which also affected salt industry. In 2024, SMAP urges government of Pakistan to lift the ban on trade with India and reducing taxes on salt imported material such as packaging to revitalize salt trade. SMAP also emphasized the cooperation between government and private salt sector to achieve higher margins in international markets.⁷⁰

Pakistan Government in 2021-2022, Prime Minister's Outreach Program was established under which, Ministry of Commerce prepared a report pink salt potential market. B2B meeting were held with countries like Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, and Nigeria. Webinars were planned for promoting marketing strategies for pink salt in global markets. The program proposed;

- Establishment of kiosks for salt industry at all international airports of Pakistan.
- Sending Pakistani salt exporters to international events for promotion and marketing.
- Sending Pakistani salt products to all embassies in Pakistan for getting a global reach.
- Urging PMDC for establishment and development of more salt tourists' destinations.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "The Islamic Republic of Pakistan Joins the Madrid System", *WIPO*. Feb 24, 2021. https://www.wipo.int/en/web/madrid-system/w/news/2021/news_0005.

⁷⁰ "Salt Industry Crisis in Pakistan", *Maritime Gateway*. March 18, 2024. <https://www.maritimegateway.com/salt-industry-crisis-in-pakistan/>.

⁷¹ Tayyaba Iftikhar, "PRODUCT REPORT- SALT (HS 250100)", *Trade Development Authority of Pakistan*. June 3, 2021. <https://tdap.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Report-on-Salt.pdf>.

Moreover, Pakistan took initiatives to market pink salt in Turkish market as Pakistan resumed freight train from Islamabad to Istanbul. The first train departed from Islamabad for Turkey, carried several goods, mainly including Pakistan Himalayan pink salt. Pink salt was sent to express it as an important national commodity that holds a special brand identity for Pakistan. This step was also taken to market Pakistani goods in Turkish markets in order to expand its reach.⁷² Also, during the year of 2022, Pakistan commodity producers decided to directly sell their products globally through digital platforms. Pakistan Mercantile Exchange PMEX established an online market place under the Global Commodity Trading Platform GCTP. This marketplace is for international sellers and buyers who purchase a commodity in bulk.⁷³ This Amazon-like platform provided opportunities for pink salt producers and exporters to access international markets through online platforms.

In 2023, the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) declared that Pakistan exports 90% of Himalayan pink salt in raw form at the rate of 60-80 US dollars per ton.⁷⁴ The export of raw pink salt at such low rates undermined Pakistan's economic potential. Given the scenario, the Punjab government decided to ban raw pink salt exports to foreign countries and to prepare a plan for setting up a value-added industry to sustain the pink salt industry.⁷⁵ Over and above, Pakistan's government has signed a Joint Venture with the US firm, the Miracle Saltworks Collective Inc. (USA) in 2024. This agreement is supposed to bring \$200 million in investment through the US salt company. The production of pink salt has to be increased 150, 000 tons from 2025 onwards. The JV also encompasses the exploration, packaging, branding, and marketing of pink salt in

⁷² "First Islamabad-Istanbul train reaches Turkey", *DAWN News*. Jan 24, 2022. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1667552>

⁷³ "Pakistan Mer-cantile Exchange plans Amazon-like platform to export commodities", *DAWN News*. Jan 2, 2022. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1667102>

⁷⁴ "Pakistan Can Earn Billions of Dollars through Export of Pink Salt: ICCI." *The Nation*, 29 Mar. 2023, <https://www.nation.com.pk/29-Mar-2023/pakistan-can-earn-billions-of-dollars-through-export-of-pink-salt-icci>.

⁷⁵ "CM bans export of raw pink salt", *DAWN News*. Sep 15, 2024. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1858997/cm-bans-export-of-raw-pink-salt>

global markets. This project is dedicated to revolutionizing the export dynamics of Pakistan's Himalayan Pink salt, which is currently undervalued in global markets.⁷⁶

In 2025, Expo 2025 Theme Weeks held in Osaka, Japan in where countries across the globe will solve global-scale issues through dialogue. The government of Pakistan hosted an interactive session on June 20, 2025, titled “Khewra Pink Rock Salt: Trade, Health, and Investment Potential”. This event was dedicated to the Osaka Expo theme “Designing Future Society of Our Lives”. This event was aimed at highlighting the value of Pakistan pink salt in terms of health benefits, trade, and investment. The eco-friendly mining and architecture of pink salt were also demonstrated during the session. Furthermore, Pakistan addressed the issue of misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt as Indian salt in global markets, which was a significant step towards protecting this valuable commodity. Along with this, pink salt products were also marketed during this event, which has a global coverage.⁷⁷

In Feb 2025, a high-level Chinese Business delegation visited Pakistan and had meetings with Chamber of Commerce and Industry ICCI. The delegation was interested in exploring export potential of Pakistani products such as mangoes, fish meal, sesame and Pakistan Himalayan pink salt. The delegation also affirmed to have their investments in areas of copper mining, technological industries, digital innovation, and heavy machinery.⁷⁸ Similarly, during March 2025, another delegation of Hong Kong Shandong Chamber of Commerce visited Pakistan and had meeting with ICCI. Both sides discussed plans for promoting trade and investments by showcasing products at exhibitions. Hong Kong Shandong delegation have also shown keen interest in Pakistan Himalayan pink salt sector, promised investments and marketing.⁷⁹

Adding more into it, Pakistan and Bangladesh have decided to enhance trade activity after the High Commissioners of both states decided to start direct flight between Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad,

⁷⁶ “Joint Venture on Pink Salt Signed between Miracle Saltworks Collective Inc. (USA) & Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation”, *Special Investment Facilitation Council*. Feb 19, 2024. https://sifc.gov.pk/success_stories/details/36

⁷⁷ “Khewra Pink Rock Salt: Trade Health & Investment Potential”, *EXPO 2025 THEME WEEKS*. June 20, 2025. Video. <https://theme-weeks.expo2025.or.jp/en/program/detail/66ed53c9bd85b>.

⁷⁸ “Chinese, Pakistani businesspersons explore new avenues for investment”, *DAWN News*. Feb 19, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1892817>

⁷⁹ “Hong Kong, Islamabad chambers discuss cooperation”, *DAWN News*. March 29, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1900946>

and Dhaka. Bangladeshi officials also expressed their interests in importing Pakistani products such as dry fruits, dairy products, marbles, rice, and mainly pink salt. Both states agreed on have joint ventures in these sectors for better collaboration and economic potentials.⁸⁰ From Sep 2023 to 2024, Bangladesh imported 47 shipments of Himalayan pink salt through 20 Pakistani exporters. Furthermore, a significant step by Gujranwala Business Centre GBC was taken to promote local industry at global level. GBC has started an initiative in to market “Made in Gujranwala” products to Africa and first shipment of these products was dispatched to Uganda and South Sudan in July 2025. This was a joint collaboration between GBC and Pakistan’s Honorary Consul in South Sudan. 25 companies’ products representing 20 industrial sectors of Gujranwala were showcased. Among these, Pakistan Himalayan pink salt and its products were the limelight.⁸¹

Recently, Pakistan Himalayan pink salt gained international spotlight. A global Summit on Women in Agriculture and Biotechnology was held in Belgium from 24 to 27 September 2025. Pakistan Himalayan pink salt combination with Amazonian biodiversity through a Brazilian innovation won distinction at the summit. The award-winning product was a soap that exemplifies that how the Pakistan unique resources inspire vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystems and innovative applications across global industries.⁸² This rising global awareness continue to fuel global demands for pink salt, positioning it as a strategic resource that can enhance Pakistan’s global trade footprints.

In the interview with Managing Director of Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation PMDC, regarding pink salt misbranding, certification and trademark issue, he asserted that PMDC has selected a logo for “Khewra Pink Rock Salt” in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce (GI-Cell). It has also conducted many consultative and awareness sessions with various stakeholders of “Khewra Pink Rock Salt” to discuss the role and responsibility of authorized users and application of the GI-tag logo. On the recommendations of PMDC, the Registrar-GI, IPO has issued fourteen (14) Registration Certificates to salt members / clients as an authorized user of

⁸⁰ “Direct flights between Pakistan, Bangladesh to launch soon: Bangladeshi envoy”, *DAWN News*. Jan 28, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1888256>

⁸¹ “Gujranwala products shipped to display centre in Africa”, *DAWN News*. July 3, 2025. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1921806>

⁸² “Pakistani Himalayan Pink Salt showcased in award-winning Brazilian product”, *MG Link News*. October 6, 2025. <https://mettisglobal.news/Pakistans-Himalayan-Pink-Salt-shines-globally-as-Brazilian-innovation-wins-international-award-in-Belgium-55718>

“Khewra Pink Rock Salt”.⁸³ This is considered as an effortful step towards protecting national commodities under legal umbrella against misbranding but it has to be strengthened further. The Volza Report, Pakistan has 682 pink salt exporters out of which 387 are active exporters till October 2024 which is a significant number.⁸⁴ According to PMDC, only 14 salt exporters have got registration certifications which is only 2 percent of the total number.

Furthermore, on the question about what initiatives Pakistan is taking to enhance digital IP monitoring and presence of Himalayan pink salt on platforms like Amazon and Alibaba, the Director IPR Enforcement, Patents GRTKF, Muhammad Ismail revealed that digital protection is quite a digital process. The Section 66 and 67 of Pakistan’s Copyright Ordinance deals with the digital protection of pink salt to some extent but there is a need to amend copyright laws according to demand of the day. He also told that Pakistan is also preparing to join WIPO Performances and Phonogram Treaty WPPT which protects the right of producers in digital world and WIPO Copyright Treaty, WCT which modernize copyright law for digital environment.⁸⁵

Interview with a representative from Sobaan Exporters Pvt. Ltd of Pakistan, Pakistan Himalayan pink salt exporters’ perspective on value-addition was endorsed. The respective representative highlighted most exporters operate with short term bulk-trading mindset for short term benefits rather than a long-term strategy. Pink salt exporter is unable to build up a great brand identity for pink salt in global markets due to lack of technology, branding expertise, and relevant trainings to exporters and producers. Additionally, small to medium exporters face challenges in accessing financing and strategic marketing guidance, making value addition a high-risk undertaking for them. He also mentioned his views on key barriers for Pakistan to build up an international brand for pink salt. He argued that high cost of international certifications and compliance, limited understanding of global retail markets, and lack of direct access to international logistics is a problem.⁸⁶

⁸³ Muhammad Farooq, Managing Director, PMDC. Personal Interview. Oct 29, 2025

⁸⁴ “Himalayan Salt Exports from Pakistan - Market Size & Demand Based on Export Trade Data”, Volza. Accessed on Oct 29, 2025. <https://www.volza.com/p/himalayan-salt/export/export-from-pakistan/>

⁸⁵ Muhammad Ismail, Director IPR Enforcement, Patents GRTKF. Personal Interview. Oct 31, 2025.

⁸⁶ Muhammad Saad, Sobaan Salt Exporter Pvt. Ltd. Personal Interview. October 1, 2025

4.9.1. Legal Hurdles for Pakistan in Registering GI:

Currently, Pakistan is facing several institutional as well as legal hurdles to meet the requirements for international GI registration for Pakistan Himalayan pink salt. Although, Pakistan has developed a GI framework for pink salt protection through GI Act 2020, yet Pakistan still lacks strong institutional capacity for its enforcement in international markets. The notable factors which restrict Pakistan's capacity to process pink salt protection are;

- High legal and administrative costs for international GI registration through hiring Intellectual Property firms abroad and contesting cases.
- Fragmented coordination between producers, exporters and stakeholders on protecting and promoting pink salt identity in international markets.
- Absence of a unified national institution for setting up standards of production, packaging, branding and exporting of Pakistani products.
- Association and certification fees (such as EU), quality audits and substantial fees of traceability checks.
- Challenges in technical documentation due to limited institutional capacity.

These factors hinder Pakistan's ability to meet criteria for successful GI registration. However, and effective policy making, institutional capacity and legal support, Pakistan can overcome these hurdles to protect pink salt identity in international markets.

Findings of The Study:

The study finds that Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is being largely misbranded in international markets by foreign entities, despite being the acclaimed natural resource with great benefits. Due to Pakistan weak institutional structure, poor authenticity and branding practices, and weak legal enforcement. Pakistan primarily exports pink salt in raw form with lack of value addition and marketing which ultimately leads to potential economic loss to salt industry. The finding also reveals that along with ineffective GI enforcement, there is also an insufficient digital traceability, absence of cohesive national branding and lack of international consumer awareness and legal assistance which collectively contributed to the issue. The stakeholder interviews also confirmed that although Pakistan has ordained GI Act 2020 to protect pink salt against misbranding but its pursuance and international recognition is still limited. Moreover, the survey findings demonstrate a clear gap between consumer usage and awareness of origin, reinforcing the urgency of advanced policy framework. Therefore, research suggests that Pakistan needs to transform pink salt into an intellectually protected commodity with integrated policy reforms, linking law, marketing, branding, digital monitoring, and trade diplomacy to reclaim Pakistan rightful ownership on pink salt and earn the potential benefits from it.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Policy Framework for Authentic Branding and Protection of Pink Salt

Pakistan has made significant efforts in promoting its pink salt industry at several national and international levels. All the above discussed initiatives exemplify the attempts to promote visibility of pink salt and its products in international markets and contributing rising figures in pink salt exports. However, notable loopholes persist which need to be addressed. The prevailing issue of misbranding of Pakistan Himalayan pink salt in international markets reveals that there is a deep structural weakness in the country's legal, marketing, branding, regulatory and institutional frameworks. Low marketing and packaging standards, fragmented coordination between government and relevant stakeholders, limiting processing facilities, lack of essential trainings to stakeholders and pink salt exporters obstructs Pakistan from fully capitalizing its natural monopoly over pink salt reserves and acquiring its full potential. Despite pink salt's unique quality, geographical origin and global recognition, Pakistan is struggling to fully capitalize the economic potential of pink salt. Pakistan has registered pink salt as a GI under PMDC provisions but still, Himalayan pink salt is vulnerable to international misbranding, false labeling and misleading information for consumers. Lack of sufficient marketing strategies, weak enforcements of GIs and absence of comprehensive national policy towards protection of unique products in global world is a question. In order to boost salt exports, Pakistan needs a very strong policy to label its products under Pakistani brands and regularize their trade to international markets for significant economic growth. It's not just for pink salt, but all the Pakistani items should be protected and promoted correctly.

5.1.1. Strengthening GI Enforcement:

The Pakistan Himalayan pink salt is being misbranded internationally because it has no global GI recognition. This is one of the main reasons among many. To protect pink salt in international markets, Pakistan needs a strong GI enforcement mechanism domestically as well as abroad. At the national level, Pakistan should ensure strict registration of GIs, certification, and labeling under Geographical Indication Act 2020, supported and monitored by Pakistan Intellectual Property Organization IPO. Pakistan should also establish a GI management committee which would be responsible for maintaining GI standards, quality assurance of the products, traceability of GI

labels and allocation of GI certificates to exporters. This committee would not merely focus on Himalayan pink salt but other unique products can also get umbrella of protection under Pakistan GI Committee. This mirrors with Indian model for Darjeeling tea and Basmati rice. The Tea Board of India ¹ and the Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) ² played a pivotal role in defending GIs in international markets and monitoring domestic use of these products. Similarly, European Union's GI protection mechanism is also an example of protecting unique products or goods from misrepresentation through a mutual recognition system.

At International level, Pakistan can strengthen GIs through bilateral and multilateral engagements. Several international agreements such as Paris Convention, Madrid Agreement, TRIPS Agreement etc. gives Pakistan an international legal framework to obtain recognition and protection for Himalayan pink salt as a GI across member states. Moreover, Pakistan can have mutual agreements with importing partners where pink salt can recognized as a GI commodity. This will not only help against misbranding but Pakistan can also promote a brand identity among international consumers for its naturally unique products. This is an example of China agreement in 2020, with EU for 200 GI recognized agri-foods against expropriation and infringement from each side.³ Pakistan can also evoke these legal remedies from international treaties as trade laws are more convenient than Human right laws in international anarchial system. Moreover, trademark registration process would not only strengthen pink salt protection but also ensure exclusive rights of brands to Pakistani exporters. Thus, pink salt protection can be a case study for several other unique products of Pakistan including Hunza apricots, Multani halwa, dates from Dera Ismail Khan, Sindhri mango, Charsadda (Peshawari) chappal, Sargodha's kinnow, Chaman grapes, Kasuri methi, Hala's Ajrak, Pashmina shawls, Swat wild mushrooms, Dir knives Nili-Ravi buffalo, Turbat and Khairpur etc.

¹ Tea Board of India. Accessed on Oct 16, 2025. <https://www.teaboard.gov.in/>

² Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA). Accessed on Oct 16, 2025. <https://apeda.gov.in/>

³ "EU-China agreement protecting geographical indications enters into force", *Delegation of the European Union to the People's Republic of China*. March 1, 2021. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/eu-china-agreement-protecting-geographical-indications-enters-force_en?s=166

5.1.2. A National Branding and Packaging Policy:

To safeguard the authenticity, legality, and the brand identity of pink salt, Pakistan needs a strong national branding and packaging policy. Most of the pink salt was used to be traded in raw form with lack of value addition at very cheap rates. The importing states, companies and brands misbrand it after making a strong value-addition in pink salt raw blocks. At the core of this policy, there should be a standardized system of packaging, labeling and certifications for all salt producing and manufacturing companies. Every product with Himalayan, or Khewra tag must be linked to official GI registrant authority to make trackability of product easy. The policy should be made mandatory for all producers and exporters to display key information of product such as, origin, GI registration number, source mine, quality grade, batch number, and QR code that allows buyers to verify product authenticity and origin through official government portal.

Second thing in national policy for packaging and branding is value-addition. Despite being endowed with various natural resources, Pakistan continues to experience a structural contradiction in its trade profile. In case of Himalayan pink salt, Pakistan exports raw salt at low prices which leaves a room for misbranding through value-addition and effective branding by foreign actors. The outsiders successfully rebrand and resell the Himalayan pink salt at premium margins while Pakistan earns nominal returns from its globally recognized product. The absence of value-addition such as purification, flavor blending, designer packaging, product diversification several wellness products, premium jars for table salt etc. retards an exponential economic effect, including job creation, marketing, foreign exchange, and brand quality. Pakistan export policy is more focused on generating revenue while less attention is paid to brand ownership, brand marketing and premium packaging.

Comparative cases from Sri Lankan Cylon tea and New Zealand Manuka Honey (already discussed above) are significant examples of how value-addition, effective branding and origin certification can effectively increase international market rate of a product. Therefore, a significant value-addition through monetary initiatives, industrial designs, and branded export strategies is a strategic necessity. Sobaan Exporter's representative suggested that Pakistani exporters can improve competitiveness by investing in value-added product lines such as gourmet salts and wellness items, and securing international certifications and forming consortia to pool resources for branding and marketing. Storytelling around the salt's Himalayan origin, alongside strong

packaging and digital marketing strategies, can also boost brand appeal. Moreover, engaging the youth in training programs related to e-commerce, packaging, and export compliance can help build long-term industry capacity. Through these initiatives, Pakistan can promote a significant brand identity in international markets.

Another essential component of proposed national policy is the use of exclusive strategic symbols, logos, colors, and designs on product packaging that represent Pakistan national identity and brand. These kinds of symbols are protected under Article 15 of TRIPS Agreement as it was earlier discussed and the article says that any symbol on a company or a country's product registered as trademark must be protected against international misbranding by other states or companies. Pakistan can register and manage these symbols, logos or trademarks through IPO, in order to certify all kind of pink salt products. These symbols can also be protected under Madrid Agreement among its 110 member states. Therefore, Pakistan can align with international branding and marketing practices to assert its rightful ownership on a globally recognized product.

5.1.3. Capacity Building and Marketing Measures:

Capacity building refers to strengthening institutional mechanisms, skill development, technological infrastructure, and marketing to enable miners and producers, processors, exporters and regulators to meet international quality. Currently, Pakistan is skill-deficit in Himalayan pink salt industry, lacking expertise in brand positioning, packaging, digital marketing, consumer psychology and legal labelling practices. In this regard, Pakistani institutions such as TDAP, IPO Pakistan, SMEDA, and PMDC should establish and promote structured training programs that are essential for upskilling exporters in modern branding techniques. These trainings should cover a range of modules such as packaging, branding, trademark symbols, legal dimensions, e-commerce market compliance, certification marks and digital traceability tools such as QR codes, tokens, batch serialization. Moreover, Pakistan should institutionalize a digital strategy to protect and promote Himalayan pink salt in international markets through a centralized certification portal that verifies product origin and registers the producers and exporters under a single GI-recognized identity. Direct-to-consumer brand stores should be established online to capture a great digital market and economic revenue.

A strategic and deliberated content for pink salt such as its uses, benefits, origin story, Khewra history, and tourism potential should be promoted through expos, digital ads, embassy pages, tourism portals, and global wellness influencers. Italy built a Consortia-Based Capacity Building, where all producers and exporters of GI product receive mandatory trainings in branding, packaging design, international marketing and export documentation. Italy established branding academies to ensure every producer and exporter knows how to defend the origin commercially and legally.⁴ Pakistan Himalayan pink salt producers and exporters can also be facilitated under “Himalayan Salt Consortium” in a similar manner. Similarly, Turkey established export coaching hubs where small firms are trained for GI storytelling, cultural branding, and digital marketing for platforms like Amazon stores, Ali Baba etc., before going into international markets. Moreover, the Turkish Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD, helps government to assess the performance of fisheries and agriculture sector, precede market trends for these sectors and evaluate designing and branding policies to address key challenges to develop sustainable and resilient departments. This organisation aids export network dialogues, fundings, research cooperation and international standards of facilitating seeds.⁵ In nearly all successful GI protection strategies, capacity building covers all, technical, legal, branding, structural training, and marketing aspects. Pakistan currently focuses only on extraction of pink salt from mines and exporting it to international market, rather than legal and pivotal branding, creating a structural gap which ultimately leads to international misbranding.

Furthermore, adding into the policy measures analysis given in the study, the Managing Director PMDC has also recommended that;

- Sale & purchase of salt as a raw material should continue to remain exempt from sales tax. There should be no GST imposed at the mining stage.
- Develop the quota of rock salt for exporters at a discounted rate with respect to their volume of exports. The salt exporters are a leading means of valuable foreign exchange for our country, and it is very important to have their fair share in sourcing of quality raw material.

⁴ “Consortium”, *PARMIGIANO REGGIANO*. Accessed on Oct 20, 2025. <https://www.parmigianoreggiano.com/consortium>

⁵ “Agriculture and Fisheries”, *OECD*. Accessed on Oct 20, 2025. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/agriculture-and-fisheries.html>

- Form Railway Container Terminals all over Punjab. Transportation costs through trucks from Punjab to Karachi have risen tremendously which needs to be tackled.
- Sending Salt Products (Gift Packages) to all Embassies of Pakistan to be distributed amongst elite buyers/importers.
- Promotion material (and products to be displayed) at top 5 most locations visited by foreign tourists with the help of relevant Tourism Departments in Pakistan.
- Proposal to PMDC for infrastructural development of Salt Range as a tourist attraction in Pakistan.
- Joint venture partnership with international companies so that we could easily penetrate the international market and export rock salt to the foreign market.
- TDAP and Pakistan embassy should manage rock salt exhibitions in different countries.

5.1.4. Diaspora-led Consumer Awareness Campaigns:

An underutilized approach for protecting Pakistan Himalayan pink salt against misbranding in international markets is to mobilize Pakistani diaspora as a frontline consumer-awareness and advocacy network. Diaspora coalitions usually operate within importing country's civil society and consumer's protection framework. This gives diaspora a legitimacy as a local stakeholder rather than foreign complainants. Pakistan can form these coalitions through professional diaspora and trading networks, chambers of commerce abroad, students' associations or community organizations which are already active in countries such as North America, Saudi Arabia, Dubai Canada, and EU countries. The role of these communities can be three-fold, pink salt promotion, consumer protection and regulatory complaint against misbranding in host countries. Since international buyers respond more strongly to local activism therefore Pakistani diaspora can run targeted awareness campaigns in foreign markets about pink salt misbranding.

Additionally, these coalitions can also file consumer protection complaints in host countries against misbranding of any Pakistani product. Just like in the US and EU, consumer deception laws allow the investigation for such filed complaints. This is the same strategy used by Peru's diaspora in Europe to protect Quinoa.⁶ and by Indian diaspora to protect Basmati Rice in UK.

⁶ Lindsey Hethcote and Alexander Wankel, "In Peru, communities are protecting quinoa diversity", *Think Landscape*. March 22, 2016. <https://thinklandscape.globallandscapesforum.org/19222/peru-communities-protecting-quinoa-diversity/>

Moreover, diaspora reporting against misbranding can put pressure on retail chains directly. Supermarkets such as Amazon, Carrefour, Tesco etc. are highly sensitive to accusations of consumer misleading, especially by local community complaints. This strategy can convert Pakistani diaspora into soft power enforcers of authenticity from passive overseas. This can be proven beneficial because it bypasses slow diplomatic channels and uses local consumer law of foreign countries to protect unique products from misbranding.

5.1.5. Strategic Retail Partnerships and Authenticity Licensing:

Strategic retail partnerships refer to a state-driven model where Pakistan can directly negotiate with huge international supermarket chains, wellness brands, and lifestyle stores to ensure pink salt is marketed with correct origin-labeling at point of sale. Pakistan can also sign Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with major retail groups such as Whole Foods, Carrefour, Amazon, Marks & Spencer, and Costco, rather than just relying on discretionary compliance and exporters. Pakistan can;

- Create a retail Partnership Cell under Ministry of Commerce, PMDC or IPO Pakistan.
- Identify priority markets in Europe, Middle East and America.
- Approach these retail chains through Pakistan trade networks or embassies.
- Sign MOUs with these retail chains.
- Retailers then able to integrate origin-check into procurement contracts.
- Annual audits of a product origin and information.
- Introduce QR codes for digital verification.

Once the agreement is accepted by retailers, no foreign distributor can misbrand Pakistan Himalayan pink salt under generic Himalayan salt label. This model is successfully used by Morocco for Argan Oil where EU and French retailers are legally committed to display the product as “Moroccan Argan Oil” under a GI clause.⁷ If Pakistan also follows this approach, a large-scale misbranding would be prevented, not only through litigation but also through retail level diplomacy where the supermarkets serve as partners in enforcements. This would also act as a

⁷ Renee Jacques, “Why You Need to Understand How Your Argan-Oil Products Are Made”, *allure*. April 30, 2015. <https://www.allure.com/story/argan-oil-production>.

branding accelerator, because global shelf visibility is the greatest form of reputational capital which Pakistan is currently lacking due to dependance on Bulk commodity exporters.

Additionally, another powerful mechanism of protection against misbranding in international markets is Authenticity Licensing model which refer to legal validation of Himalayan pink salt as a licensed commercial term owned by Pakistani state. Under this mechanism, any external brand which tries to market pink salt must require an official license from Pakistan designated authority. In return, that brand would pay a royalty or certification fee which not only allows to generate direct revenue but also gives an effectual, legal leverage to Pakistan to restrict misbranding and false advertisement of Himalayan pink salt. This model was successfully implemented by Ethiopia in 2004, to protect its Sidamo and Yirgacheffe coffees. According to this, the multinational retailers such as Starbucks signed a licensing agreement to acknowledge Ethiopia as the source country of these particular coffees before using it commercially.⁸ This key model shifts protection mechanism to a proactive ownership from a defensive legal system. In this way, if any foreign entity misbrands Pakistan Himalayan pink salt, Pakistan can sue for licensing rights breaching. This would standardize Pakistan Himalayan pink salt authenticity at commercial and legal level, ensuring its origin visibility, brand identity and economic retention.

Regarding the authenticity of Pakistani brand and awareness campaigns to enhance Pakistan's ability to protect its geographical indications, IPO Director, Muhammad Ismail suggested that National GI Policy, awareness among all stakeholders in the supply chain, Establishment of Collective Management Associations, encouraging Authorized Users to register with IPO and branding Pakistan's GIs by using digital tools is need of the hour. Moreover, there should be representative offices in foreign countries for Pakistani product to monitor the branding and awareness campaigns so that any misbranding activity by foreign entities against Pakistani products could be legally questioned.

5.2. Limitations and Future Recommendations:

The research makes an important contribution to the understanding of pink salt misbranding in international markets but it is a subject to certain methodological and structural limitations.

⁸ "Making the Origin Count: Two Coffees", *WIPO Magazine*. Sep 24, 2007. <https://www.wipo.int/en/web/wipo-magazine/articles/making-the-origin-count-two-coffees-35887>.

Although the study is based on mixed-method approach based on qualitative data from stakeholder interviews and secondary sources and numerical data regarding trade and economic data along with critical theoretical approach. However, this research does not incorporate a large-scale quantitative survey of foreign consumers, retailers, legal and regulatory officials which could further validate the misperception of foreign consumers. Additionally, the access to international supply chain data and propriety commercial agreements of foreign brands was limited. Some websites also required paid subscription which restricted to some extent, the ability to trace how misbranding is operationalized through various global digital salt sellers. These limitations, however do not undermine the validity of research findings, rather it highlighted the need for future studies to complement this work through multi country data collection and consumer side behavioral evidences.

However, this research can be further expanded by incorporating consumers evidences and perception from foreign markets through direct surveys or experimental designs that how country-of-origin information affects their purchasing behavior. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking how pink salt GI enforcement evolves branding and marketing potential. If the above discussed measures are implemented successfully, future researchers may also examine that to what extent these policies have worked and what can be the better policies further. Also, at a macro-legal level, researchers may explore whether WTO dispute mechanism or Intra-state trade remedies could be invoked. Furthermore, this research sets a policy structure for how Pakistan can reclaim its ownership for other natural and heritage products which are also facing misbranding issue in international markets. Future scholars can also apply the same analytical framework to other undervalued and misbranded products.

5.3. Conclusion:

The misbranding of Himalayan pink salt in international markets reflects a deep structural imbalance between Pakistan's resource ownership and ability to extract economic and reputational value from that ownership. Although the world has associated Himalayan identity with wellness, purity, natural heritage, but global consumers are rarely informed that the only geological source of this national treasure is Pakistan. This dysconnectivity between origin and perception allow foreign entities such as India to market Himalayan pink salt through rebranding, repackaging and false country-of-origin labeling. As a result, they earn and capture huge market share in pink salt international markets, consumer loyalty and brand identity. The existing literature on GI protection, misbranding, value-chain governance, and trade branding strongly indicates the states which control the narrative of origin retain the highest economic rewards. Case studies on Parmigiano Reggiano (Italy), Champagne (France), Ceylon Tea (Sri Lanka), Manuka Honey (New Zealand), Darjeeling Tea (India) etc., reflects that the decisive factors behind misbranding is due to the lack of institutional control over product identity.

This phenomenon is validated by the theoretical lens where the Geo-economic theory explains how the control over market narratives can shift economic power internationally and how states use these narratives to exploit economic interests of other states in a bigger picture. The Liberal Institutionalism highlights the role of treaties, international cooperation, and legal harmonization to strengthen a product's origin-based protection. Similarly, the Legal positivism clarifies that rights only matter if they are translated into enforceable measures rather than just moral, cultural or historical claims. While Consumer Protection and Regulatory theory states that consumers cannot reward authenticity if they are deliberately misled and misinformed. Altogether, these theories show that misbranding of pink salt is not merely a trademark dispute, it's a case of institutional weakness, economic sovereignty and market asymmetry.

The research findings have declared that Pakistan exports most of the pink salt in bulk form with least value addition. There is a lack of a unified national brand architecture, coordinated exports and legal enforcement, and digital traceability mechanisms which allows foreign entities to misbrand Pakistan Himalayan pink salt in international markets. Therefore, the research proposes a shift from passive and inert ownership to active and effective enforcement. The recommended advanced measures demonstrate that Pakistan must not only register pink salt internationally but

also strategically govern its commercial brand identity. The long-term solutions for misbranding of pink salt lies in Pakistan's ability to integrate law, digital governance, marketing, and diplomacy into a single institutional framework. Furthermore, primary survey evidence demonstrates a clear gap between widespread domestic consumption of Himalayan pink salt and limited awareness regarding its origin, branding, and international value.

In essence, the misbranding of Himalayan pink salt in international markets is not just the case of economic exploitation by one state against the other but it's an institutional gap, weak enforcement mechanism, lack of sustainable national policy and low branding and marketing capacity. Hence, protecting pink salt is a test case for Pakistan that whether it can convert its unique national resource into internationally recognized intellectual property asset. If implemented effectively, the proposed policy framework would transform Pakistan into a branding state capable of defending its premium resources and heritage in international markets.

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ANNEXURE

Interviews' Questions:

Intellectual Property Organization of Pakistan, IPO:

1. How much effective are Pakistan's current intellectual property laws, particularly the Geographical Indications Act, 2020?
2. What major administrative or legal challenges does Pakistan face in enforcing trademarks in international markets and Pakistan's ownership rights to its commodities, especially against false branding practices by foreign companies?
3. How does IPO-Pakistan collaborate with international organizations such as WTO or WIPO to strengthen Pakistan's position in protecting its indigenous products under global treaties?
4. With the rise of digital marketing forums like Amazon and Alibaba, how is IPO-Pakistan addressing the problem of online misbranding and are there any ongoing initiatives to strengthen digital IP monitoring or enforcement?
5. What institutional improvements, policy reforms, or awareness campaigns are necessary to enhance Pakistan's ability to protect and promote authentic branding of products like Himalayan pink salt?

Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation:

1. Why Pakistan is relatively slow in pursuing GI registration for Himalayan Pink Salt compared to other countries with their flagship commodities?
2. Is PMDC currently pursuing GI enforcement or certifications for Himalayan Pink Salt internationally? If so, what challenges are being faced?
3. How can Pakistan ensure traceability in the pink salt supply chain, and what role can standards such as HACCP protocols or ISO 22000 play?
4. What measures could strengthen the pink salt industry and help it to reach its potential?
5. What role can Pakistani pink salt exporters play in attaining great economic potential from international pink salt markets?

Pink Salt Exporter:

1. The raw pink salt is exported at relatively low margins while processed and branded products abroad fetch significantly higher prices, why Pakistani pink salt exporters are not investing more in value-added branding and packaging, despite higher margins abroad?
2. What barriers are there in setting up international branding and distribution channels for pink salt exporters in Pakistan?
3. When pink salt is being retailed abroad for significantly higher prices then why does Pakistan continue to export it at extreme low prices?
4. How can international retail chains like Carrefour and Amazon help promote Pakistani pink salt brands globally?
5. How can pink salt exporters contribute to economic growth and competitive advantage, beyond governance?

Survey Questionnaire:

Title:

Usage and Awareness about Himalayan Pink Salt in Pakistan

Purpose of Survey:

This survey aims to understand how people in Pakistan use and perceive Himalayan pink salt in their daily lives. It explores usage patterns, reasons for low or high consumption, and awareness about its high value in international markets. The purpose is to see whether pink salt is undervalued and underused locally despite being expensive and highly demanded abroad.

Questions:

1. Which type of salt do you mostly use at home?

- White Salt
- Pink Slat
- Red Salt
- Not Sure

2. What is the main reason you prefer pink salt (if you use it)?

- Health Benefits
- Taste
- Trend/Fashion
- I don't use Pink Salt

3. How aware are you about the health and nutritional claims of Himalayan pink salt?

- Very Aware
- Somewhat aware
- Heard of it but don't know details

- Not aware at all

4. When you buy pink salt, what mainly influences your choice?

- Packaging/Branding
- Price
- Benefits
- I don't Buy Pink Salt

5. Are you aware of pink salt international market value?

- Yes
- No

6. In your opinion, what gives a product more value?

- Quality and Origin
- Marketing and Packaging
- Foreign Branding
- Price
- All of these