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Beyond Raw Exports: Capturing Value from Pakistan's Himalayan Pink Salt

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Executive Summary

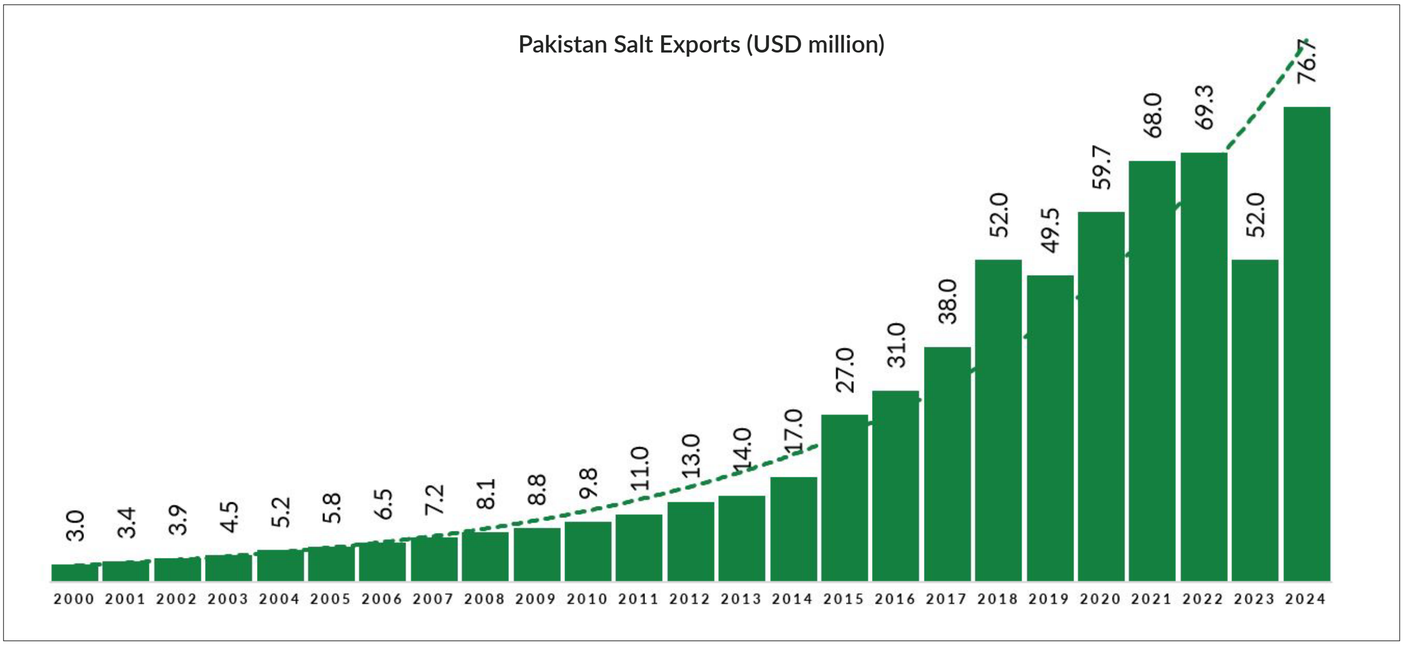
Pakistan holds the world's second-largest salt reserves overall and is the only country with a Himalayan Pink salt reserve. The global market for Himalayan Pink Salt is valued at $500 million - $1.2 billion, spanning food and culinary, wellness, decorative, and other consumer uses. The global market for food and the culinary segment alone was estimated at approximately $500 million in 2026, growing at a CAGR of 3.6%. Despite having huge salt reserves, Pakistan's overall salt export revenue was only $76.7 million in 2024, which is a small fraction of the global Himalayan Salt market value. The reason behind such low revenue is the lack of value addition. Pakistan exports most of its salt in raw form, worth $0.15 to $0.30 per kg, without proper processing and packaging. The same salt, after proper processing, branding, and packaging abroad, is sold for $8 to $15 per kg in the global market. The opportunity lies in the value gap. This study has presented different value capture scenarios along the Himalayan Pink Salt value chain. Through proper processing, packaging, branding, and by targeting high-value product categories such as wellness and decorative segments and premium products, Pakistan can increase the value realization many times over. The real opportunity lies in capturing this value gap. Pakistan needs immediate actions to capture high value through improved infrastructure, building a Pakistani brand, securing a GI tag, targeting high-value products, improving product competitiveness, and prioritizing regional markets.

Introduction

Salt is one of the widely traded commodities, which serves as an essential input for food, health, industry, and commerce. Apart from its application, several salt products have emerged as premium products in global markets. This is due to growing demand for natural, wellness, and gourmet products. Himalayan Pink Salt stands out among these for its rarity, unique characteristics, and significant appeal in international markets. Pakistan has the world's only Himalayan Pink Salt reserves. Salt is a fundamental yet often overlooked resource (Rahman et al., 2026). Pakistan has the largest salt reserves, 300 km long, with billions of tons of salt, stretching from Khewra to Kohat (Waheed et al., 2023). Khewra Pink Rock Salt, commonly known as Himalayan Pink Salt, is one of the purest salts available, which is famous for its striking pink color, health benefits, and mineral-rich content. This natural mineral salt is primarily sourced from the Khewra Salt Mines in Pakistan. It is the second-largest salt mine in the world overall and the largest single pink salt reserve.

The Khewra Mine reserves are estimated to contain over 1 billion tonnes of rock salt. The salt in these reserves is 98% to 99% pure and utilized for edible and export purposes. It is considered a valuable salt due to its mineral content and diverse products such as table salt, spa and massage products, home decoration, salt tiles and bricks, salt lamps, salt baskets, other wellness products, among others (Ghani Group, 2025). Although Pakistan has the second-largest salt reserves in the world, the country's highest export revenue from salt is only $76.7 million, a fraction of the global market (Rahman et al., 2026). This low revenue is due to the lack of value addition because Pakistan's salt exports are mainly in raw form (Waheed et al., 2023). It is an excellent opportunity for value addition to enhance export revenue.

Fig 1: Pakistan's Salt Export (2000 – 2024)



Source: Author's compilation based on data taken from World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS).

This Policy Viewpoint aims to highlight the current global market for Himalayan Pink Salt, total reserves that Pakistan possesses, Pakistan's export performance of this salt, and the value gap between current Himalayan Pink Salt exports and high-value salt products by identifying the value addition opportunities.

Global Pink Salt Market and Pakistan's Contribution

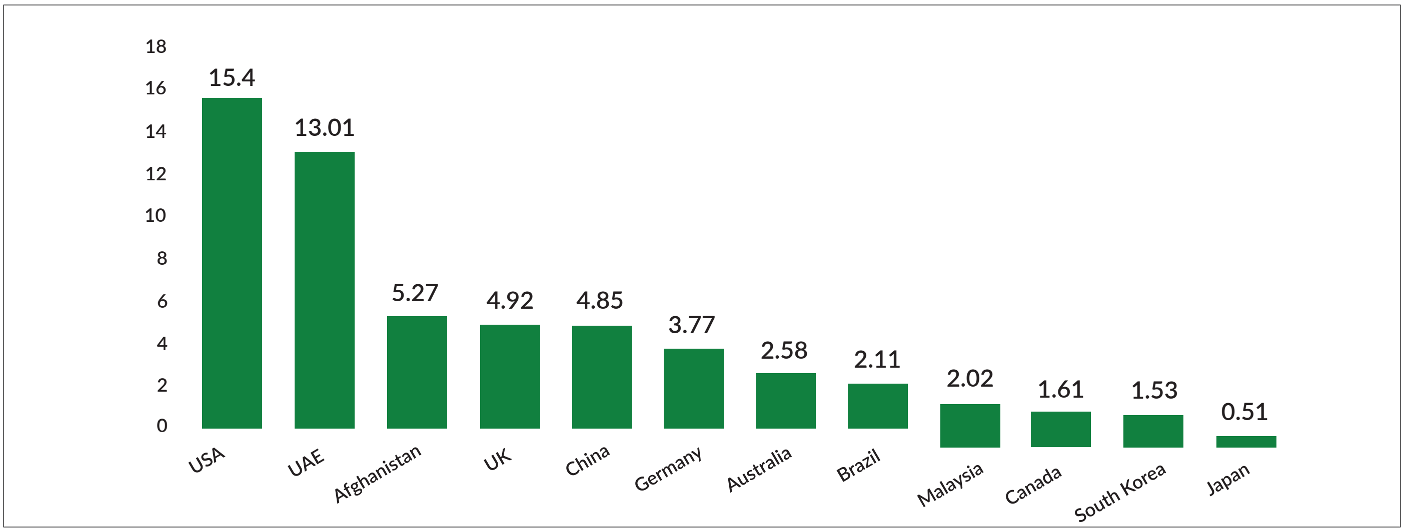
The global consumer market for Himalayan Pink salt is estimated at $500 million to $1.2 billion. The market has a decent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4% to 5%. The United States is the largest buyer of salt from Pakistan. The USA imported $15.4 million worth of salt from Pakistan in 2024. The second-largest market is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with $13 million in pink salt imports in 2024. The United Kingdom (UK), China, and Afghanistan are in the list of the top 5 importers. In the first quarter of 2025, there was a rapid surge in imports from China; Pakistan exported 13640 tons of salt to China, which was an increase of 40 percent in salt imports from Pakistan to China. Table 1 shows the global market for pink salt.

Table 1: Global Pink Salt Market Scenario.

Category	Value
Global market size (2024)	$500 million – $1.2 billion
Compounded annual growth rate (CAGR)	4% to 5%
Pakistan's largest importer	USA - ~ 49% all shipments (consignment count)
Global food and the culinary market	~ $500 million
2nd largets buyer	UAE - $13 million (2024)
Rapidly growing segment	Wellness segment - 9.3% CAGR
China - growing market (2025 Q1 growth)	13,640 tons imported from Pakistan. +40% year-on-year

Source: Author's compilation based on data taken from World Integrated Trade Solution, Deepbeez trade data (2024–2025), 6W Research, Pink Himalayan Salt Market Report, Straits Research, and Express Tribune.

Fig 2: Pakistan's Major Salt Export Destination (by country, Million USD).



Source: Author's compilation based on data taken from World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), 2024.

Pakistani firms have been tempted to pursue the large Western markets such as the USA and EU, but are unable to capture any value in these markets due to a lack of managerial expertise, brand equity, and distribution control. In the meantime, the geographically and culturally closer markets, China, Japan, and South Korea, are being ignored. These markets provide less 'psychic distance', better growth opportunities, and enable family businesses to exert greater brand and distribution control[1].

China is the largest nearby market with explosive growth in the wellness segment. The Japanese market has maximum per-unit premium potential for traceable and recognized natural products having compelling origin stories. Similarly, South Korea's K-beauty and wellness industry is growing rapidly with rising demand for natural minerals and skincare and spa products. All these markets have an active online consumer culture as well.

Pakistan's Salt Resources and Export Performance

Pakistan owns over 10 billion tons of salt deposits (Hussain et al., 2021). It includes mainly rock salt; however, it has some limited production of sea and lake salt. The deposits of Himalayan pink salt are commercially viable only in Pakistan. The Khewra Salt Mine has over 1 billion tonnes of reserves, which is centuries' worth of supply at the current rate of extraction. There is no other country that can genuinely compete on the origin of Himalayan Pink Salt. The annual extraction of pink salt is estimated to be approximately 400,000 tonnes. In 2024, Pakistan achieved a five-year high export revenue, earning $76.7 million, an extremely small figure compared to the global salt market value. The reason behind such low revenue from exports is that Pakistan exports salt in raw form, without proper processing, cleaning, branding, and value addition. This shows there is a big opportunity for Pakistan to improve the value addition and branding.

Table 2: Pakistan's Pink Salt Resources and Exports.

Category	Value
Overall Khewra Mine Reserves	Over 1 billion tonnes
Annual extraction	~400,000 tons
Share of global export of Himalayan salt	~45% - Pakistan dominates supply
Total salt exports (2024)	$76.72 million (Including all salts)
Countries Pakistan's exporting to	90+ countries
Exports sent to all destinations (Nov 2023–Oct 2024)	3,789 shipments - 10% year-on-year increase

Source: Author's compilation based on data taken from the Geological Survey of Pakistan, Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation (PMDC), and Business Insider.

1.Rahman, I., Sabir, M., Ali, Y., & Khan, S. (2026). Strategic market selection for exports: A case study of Pakistan's salt exports. Review of International Business and Strategy. https://doi.org/10.1108/RIBS-04-2025-0059

Recent Developments

1. Ban on Export to India

Following India's imposition of a 200% tariff on imports from Pakistan in 2019 and a complete trade ban on salt exports to India in 2025, Pakistan was compelled to diversify its export markets and establish direct trade channels with China, the UAE, and the EU. In the first quarter of 2025, salt imports to China alone went up by 40 per cent.

2. Geographical Indication (GI) Tag

In 2020, Pakistan introduced the Geographical Indication Act to protect the intellectual property rights of Himalayan Pink Salt. GI tagging is a powerful tool for branding and premium pricing. Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation (PMDC) is trying to register pink salt as a GI product.

3. Punjab Government Ban on Raw Salt Export

In 2024, CM Punjab ordered a ban on the export of raw pink salt to promote local value addition and increase revenue. The policy's objective was to develop a local value-added, processed Pink Salt industry rather than shipping raw materials.

4. Wellness Products: Fastest Growing Segment

Bath salts and spa products represent the fastest-growing market segment, with an estimated CAGR of 9.3%. A global consumer shift toward natural, wellness-oriented, and clean-label products is driving this rapid expansion. Himalayan pink salt aligns closely with these preferences, hence creating a huge opportunity for revenue generation.

5. E-Commerce

The rapid expansion of e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Shopify, Daraz, and Alibaba has significantly lowered barriers to entry for small and medium-sized businesses. Pakistani entrepreneurs can now access consumers directly in major markets, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Gulf region

The Value Gap

Pakistan currently exports raw salt for $0.15 to $0.30 per kg. The same salt, after proper processing, branding, and packaging abroad, is sold for $8 to $15 per kg in the global market. A 1 kg pouch of processed pink salt costs $0.6 at the manufacturer, and in the retail-branded market it costs more than $10 in the West[2]. Pakistan lags in creating its own branding and packaging. Pakistan, being the only supplier of pink salt, has a huge opportunity to fill this disparity with value addition through proper processing, packaging, and branding to earn the maximum profit possible. For years, other countries have imported Pakistani Himalayan Pink Salt and sold it through their own packaging and rebranding with no recognition of its Pakistani origin.

2.Andersen, S., & Orwig, J. (2026). Inside the mine that fuels the $500 million pink Himalayan salt market. Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/inside-pink-himalayan-salt-khewra-mine-fueling-500-million-market-2026-4

Table 3: Pakistan's Himalayan Salt Value Chain: Pakistan's Current Position and Untapped Potential

Product type	Realized Price	Pakistan Today?
Raw salt at mine site	$0.05–0.15/kg	Majority of output
Crushed and bagged	$0.15–0.30/kg	Current typical export
Processed and certified (wholesale)	$0.60–1.20/kg	Limited
Retail branded (Amazon / grocery)	$8–15/kg	Minimal Pakistani brands
Wellness / decorative articles (lamps, bath salts)	$15–35 per unit	Minimal Pakistani brands
High quality gifts/spa collections	$20–60+ per set	Very limited export

Source: Author's Compilation based on data taken from Geological Survey of Pakistan, Amazon ASIN data, Royal Salt/SaltWorks retail pricing, Pakistan&counting.

The value ladder in Table 3 illustrates how the value of the same salt can be enhanced by processing and product diversification. The prices indicate that the value of salt increases by more than 100-fold from the raw salt category to the high-quality premium gifts category, revealing high value-capture potential along the value chain.

Table 4: Illustrative Value-Capture Scenarios along the Value Chain

Stages of value chain	Unit	Lower limit (USD)	Upper limit (USD)	Value gain	Revenue projections
Salt at mine (unprocessed)	Per kg	$0.05	$0.15	***0.4x***	*Low*
Crushed & bagged (Pakistan's current export)	Per kg	$0.15	$0.30	***Baseline***	
Processed (wholesale)	Per kg	$0.60	$1.2	***4x***	*Moderate*
Branded – Retail (grocery / Amazon, premium packaging)	Per kg	$8	$15	***51x***	
Wellness & decorative sets (lamps, bath salts, cooking blocks)	Per unit	$15	$35	***111x***	*High*
Premium products (spa sets, hotel amenities etc)	Per unit	$20	$60	***178x***	

Source: Author's compilation.

Table 4 shows a huge value gap along the value chain. Currently, Pakistan exports minimally processed or raw salt for much lower value. By targeting high-value product categories and through proper processing and branding, Pakistan can increase the value realization many times over. The prices of each category along the value change indicate that by targeting high-value products, earnings can be enhanced significantly. The real opportunity lies in capturing this value gap.

Challenges

The majority of Pink salt products fall in the wellness, decor, and culinary categories. Due to this, standards of processing, certification, and supply chain integrity are important, not only the quality of the raw mineral. This is the area where most of the operators fail in Pakistan. A "food grade" is more than just a label; it's a rigorous, verifiable set of criteria that calls for appropriate processing, treatment, and testing, from the way extraction is done to how the packaging is done. Currently, most of the operators in Pakistan grind the raw salt and pack it in bags without complying with these standards[3]. Due to which, the products do not hold up to serious international buyers. High processing standards and real certifications are the actual differentiators, not a lower price.

According to Business Insider's recent report, major challenges include improper processing, low certification quality, slow extraction rates, unskilled workers at the mine site, manual extraction, and a lack of equipment for processing that meets international standards[4]. Most of the work at the mine site is being done by hand using the same mining tools for over a century: hand drills, gunpowder, and hand augers. Moreover, there is inefficient extraction of salt blocks due to a lack of equipment and modern facilities. Most operators grind and bag without properly removing impurities gained through the mining process, which makes the salt not safe for use as food. In Pakistan, certificates can be obtained too easily, while International buyers, Walmart, and EU importers verify more rigorously before issuing certificates.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Direction 1: Initiate Himalayan Pink Salt Value Chain Programme

The Government of Pakistan should initiate a Himalayan Pink Salt Value Chain Programme at the national level, which should be executed sequentially in four stages, i.e., Certify, Process, Brand, and Scale, to shift the salt industry from raw extraction to certified, branded, and premium product export.

Phase 1: Build the foundation

- Create a Salt Quality Bureau under TDAP for testing, grading and certifying all export lots
- Obtain fast-track FDA (USA), EFSA (EU) and Halal certifications for 5 pilot processing facilities.
- Start Salt Industry Vocational Training with TEVTA Punjab (Grading, Processing, Packaging & Export Documentation).
- Complete a full Processing Capacity Gap study with SMAP and private exporters.

Phase 2: Build the Infrastructure

- Establish Common Facility Centres (CFCs) within 50km of Khewra for shared crushing, washing, drying & packaging for the use of SME exporters
- Sliding export tariff on raw, unprocessed salt to be collected and used for financing the SME Processing Loan Fund.
- Create 6 product lines of added value: cooking blocks, bath salts, lamps, gourmet flavoured salts, animal lick blocks, grilling tiles

Phase 3: Build the Brand

- Register 'Khewra Pink Rock Salt' as a GI domestically (IPO-Pakistan), then file for protection directly in USA, EU, UK, UAE & China, anchored in WTO TRIPS obligations.
- Launch 'Khewra Certified' national label - Protected Logo licensed to qualifying exporters with quality & traceability requirements

- Organize TDAP/PMDC delegations to attend Fancy Food Shows in Dubai, Japan, USA, Germany, South Korea and meet the premium retail & hotel buyers
- Launch official Pakistan Himalayan Salt stores on Amazon US/UK/DE, Noon (UAE), Coupang (S.Korea) and Tmall (China).

Phase 4: Scale and Enforce

- Start a Salt Entrepreneurs Incubator: 12-Month Programme to provide subsidised equipment access, market linkages and export mentorship to SMEs
- Collaborate with NCA Lahore & Indus Valley Karachi to deliver high-quality packaging. Collaborate with Pakistani celebrities to achieve worldwide reach, social proof, and aspirational appeal.
- Target $500M in value-added salt exports by the end of the program.

Policy Direction 2: Target High-Value Pink Salt Products.

The wellness and decor segment is fast-growing; demand for products such as spa products, bath salts, salt lamps, massage stones, and exfoliating scrubs is growing steadily. Focusing on these high-value products can increase salt export revenue many times. These products, along with proper packaging compliance, product consistency, regulatory alignment, and accurate documentation, can further enhance product quality and competitiveness in global markets.

Policy Direction 3: Target Regional Markets First

The Government of Pakistan should adopt a “Regional First” export strategy, with the main focus on nearby markets, such as China, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea, for the export of Pakistani Himalayan Salt through the means of trade agreements, export facilitation, preferential tariffs, simplified customs procedures, and GI registration. These markets are geographically nearer, have higher growth rates in the premium salt market, and are more compatible with the operational realities of the Pakistani export companies.

3.Andersen, S., & Orwig, J. (2026). Inside the mine that fuels the $500 million pink Himalayan salt global market. Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/inside-pink-himalayan-salt-khewra-mine-fueling-500-million-market-2026-4

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Conclusion

Despite having the largest reserves of the rare Himalayan Pink Salt, which is both mineral-rich and of high purity, Pakistan's salt exports stand at only $76 million. The exports are dominated by low-value raw salt with minimal processing and packaging. Pakistan has a huge opportunity to enhance its salt revenue through value addition. Most of the value addition, which includes premium packaging, branding, and high-value wellness products, occurs outside Pakistan after it exports the raw salt to other countries, mainly the US, EU, and UAE. The demand for the value-added products of the wellness and decor segment is increasing globally. Pakistan can take advantage of this opportunity through immediate and serious policy actions. To capture the market and gain maximum revenue, Pakistan must add value to Himalayan Pink Salt through improved infrastructure, building a Pakistani brand, registering a GI tag, targeting high-value products, improving product competitiveness, and targeting regional markets first. Through strategic value addition, branding, marketing and product diversification, Pakistan can convert its Himalayan Pink Salt industry into a globally competitive and high-value industry.

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