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## **FEATURE ARTICLE**

### **“The Price of Pampering: When Self-Care Turns into Sales Pressure”**

Self-care has become an important part of everyday life. Many consumers visit salons and spas for services such as hair treatments, facials, and massages, not only to look good but also to relax and feel confident.

However, what is often planned as a simple, budgeted service can quickly become far more expensive than expected. Through subtle pressure, upselling, and persuasive recommendations, consumers may find themselves agreeing to additional treatments they did not intend to purchase. For example, a \$200 keratin treatment or massage can easily turn into a much larger bill, leaving consumers surprised at the final cost.

This feature article looks at how and why this happens, the tactics used to influence consumer decisions, and the practical steps consumers can take to stay in control of their spending while still enjoying self-care services.

#### **More Than Just a Service**

Imagine this, you book an appointment for a basic facial treatment. You have done your research, you know the cost, and you have mentally prepared your budget. Upon arrival, you are warmly greeted, offered a seat, and perhaps even a complimentary beverage. The experience begins pleasantly, and then comes the consultation.

A staff member examines your face closely, perhaps with concern. “Your skin is quite damaged,” they might say. “This treatment alone will not give you the best results.” They suggest a pre-treatment mask, then a facial detox, and perhaps a special serum to “lock in” the treatment. Each recommendation sounds reasonable, especially when you want the best outcome.

Here is where things begin to shift. Each additional service carries a cost, often not clearly stated upfront. The language used is persuasive, sometimes urgent, making it feel as though declining these add-ons would compromise the results. In that moment, many consumers feel pressured to agree, not because they fully understand the value, but because they trust the “expert” or feel uncomfortable saying no.

Before you know it, your \$200 treatment has quietly turned into a \$500 bill.

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### **Understanding the Sales Strategy**

Upselling is not inherently wrong. In many industries, businesses recommend additional products or services to enhance customer satisfaction. The issue arises when these recommendations become persistent, unclear, or misleading. Salon environments are particularly effective for this type of selling. Consumers are often in a relaxed state, physically seated and committed to the process. There is also a natural power imbalance. Staff are viewed as professionals with expertise, and their opinions carry weight.

There is also a psychological factor at play. Once a consumer has already committed to spending money, they may feel more inclined to agree to further costs. This is often referred to as the sunk cost effect, where the initial investment influences continued spending decisions.

### **The Fine Line Between Advice and Pressure**

It is important to recognise the difference between genuine professional advice and sales pressure.

A responsible service provider should:

- Clearly explain why an additional treatment is recommended;
- Disclose the cost upfront before proceeding; and
- Respect a customer's decision if they decline.

Red flags may include:

- Vague explanations with no clear benefits;
- Reluctance to provide pricing details;
- Statements that create urgency or fear about poor results; and
- Continuing to push services after a customer has declined.

Consumers should feel empowered to make decisions, not cornered into them.

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### **Why Consumers Often Say Yes?**

Many consumers later reflect and wonder why they agreed to services they did not plan for. The reasons are often subtle but powerful. There is a desire to trust professionals. When someone appears knowledgeable and confident, it feels natural to follow their recommendations. There is also a social aspect. Saying no in a face-to-face setting can feel uncomfortable, especially in an environment that is meant to be relaxing and positive.

Additionally, once the service has started, consumers may feel it is too late to back out. This creates a situation where decisions are made quickly, without full consideration of cost or necessity.

### **The Financial Impact**

While an extra \$50 or \$100 may seem insignificant in the moment, repeated experiences like this can add up quickly. Over time, consumers may find themselves spending far more on beauty and wellness services than originally intended.

For some, this can place unnecessary strain on their finances. Budgeting becomes difficult when final costs are unpredictable, and this undermines the very purpose of planning for self-care.

### **Practical Tips for Consumers**

Consumers can take simple steps to stay in control of their spending while still enjoying salon services.

Set a clear budget before your appointment and communicate it if necessary. Ask for the price of any additional service before agreeing to it. Take your time to decide and do not feel rushed into making a choice. Be comfortable saying no. A polite refusal is always your right. Request a breakdown of costs before the service begins if possible.

Being informed and assertive can make a significant difference in the overall experience.

### **A Shared Responsibility**

While consumers must remain vigilant, service providers also have a responsibility to ensure transparency and ethical practices. Building trust with customers should always take priority over maximising sales. Clear communication, honest recommendations, and respect for customer choices not only enhance the consumer experience but also contribute to long-term business success.

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## **Conclusion**

Self-care should feel rewarding, not regretful. A visit to the salon or spa should leave consumers feeling refreshed and confident, not stressed about unexpected expenses. By understanding how upselling works and recognising the signs of sales pressure, consumers can better navigate these experiences and make choices that align with their needs and budgets.

Should consumers face issues related to unclear pricing, misleading practices, or feel pressured into services they did not agree to, they are encouraged to seek assistance. The Council is available to support and guide consumers through such concerns. You can reach the Council through the National Consumer Helpline 155 or email us at [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org).

Being informed is the first step towards being empowered. When consumers know their rights and feel confident to exercise them, they can truly enjoy the benefits of self-care without compromise.

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