

WASTE ADVERTISING TAX

Proposal for the introduction of a tax on regressive and invasive communication

"The happiest man is the one who has the fewest desires."

(Traditional Eastern proverb)

Advertising, on the other hand, promises happiness—but subtly trains us for dissatisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

This document proposes a structured reflection on the impact of commercial communication, and introduces an economic compensation mechanism to address its negative effects.

This is not a draft law, but a conceptual, operational, and value-based framework to guide future legislative initiatives.

WHAT IS “ADVERTISING WASTE”?

Every day, we’re exposed to hundreds of ads. These don’t just offer products—they shape desires and behaviors, often reinforcing stereotypes, harmful habits, and distorted views of reality.

We call “**advertising waste**” those messages which, though formally legal, have negative impacts on public health, social cohesion, and quality of life. It’s not the single message that’s harmful—it’s the cumulative effect.

HIDDEN COSTS FOR SOCIETY

The effects of advertising waste show up in:

- **Public Health:** obesity, eating disorders, psychological distress (estimated cost: €9 billion/year)
- **Social Inequality:** reinforcement of stereotypes and insecurity (up to €20 billion/year)
- **Compulsive Consumption:** debt, symbolic dependency (up to €10 billion/year)
- **Environmental Impact:** overproduction, waste (over €5 billion/year)

Even if only part of these costs are due to advertising, the burden is clear.

THE PROPOSAL

Introducing a tax on advertising waste

Campaigns will be subject to a proportional contribution, based on the presence of regressive or invasive content.

Freedom of expression is not limited—a compensatory mechanism is introduced, similar to environmental taxation.

OBJECTIVE EVALUATION

Campaigns are assessed using a technical and measurable evaluation grid, publicly available.

Criteria include: content, communicative style, frequency, target audience, and exposure mode.

INCENTIVES FOR RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATION

Campaigns promoting positive values will be rewarded with tax exemptions, institutional visibility, and an **IMPACT-** certification mark.

SensiCom

Observatory for Responsible Commercial Communication

SensiCom is a public body with operational autonomy and independent technical function, created to identify, assess, and classify ad campaigns based on their social and cultural impact.

Main Functions:

- Evaluation of campaigns for compensation or recognition
- Monitoring content across TV, digital, gaming, immersive media
- Producing reports, guidelines, educational materials
- Collaborating with public bodies, schools, universities, and research centers

Technology and Methodology

SensiCom runs a 24/7 hybrid digital platform combining AI and human oversight.

- AI detects problematic patterns: sensory overload, toxic rhetoric, covert pressure, stereotypes.
- Flagged content is reviewed by a multidisciplinary team (psychologists, sociologists, advertisers, communication philosophers).

- Campaigns are benchmarked against a comparative archive to ensure consistency, precedent, and impartiality.
 - Final assessments are made by humans—AI only signals.
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CERTIFICATION

There are two types:

- **Pre-launch (preventive certification):** checks for coherence and offers suggestions
- **Post-air (retroactive audit):** applies tax to already broadcast campaigns if warranted

Certification also identifies **virtuous campaigns**, validating their alignment with shared values.

Benefits include:

- Tax exemption
- IMPACT– label
- Public visibility

Certified campaigns are listed in a public, searchable online register.

All evaluations are documented, justified, and subject to appeal—without delaying ad scheduling.

A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR EUROPE

SensiCom is not just a watchdog. It's a public infrastructure designed to become a European leader in ad evaluation, research, and education.

Strategic Activities:

- Partnerships with universities, research institutes, and international organizations
- Management of a vast digital archive of advertising content
- Publication of reports, guidelines, and thematic dossiers
- Educational tools for schools, media operators, and businesses
- Public helpdesk for feedback, advice, and citizen participation

It's designed to evolve with the media landscape: immersive environments, AI-native interaction, new formats.

The medium-term goal: to be a replicable model of communication governance, raising awareness across the European advertising ecosystem.

RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATION FUND

Funded by the tax, it supports education, cultural, social, and environmental initiatives.

Funding Note

SensiCom is publicly funded independently of the tax revenue, to ensure transparency and prevent conflicts of interest.

HOW EVALUATION WORKS

Two main types of waste:

- **Invasive (low–medium severity):** sensory overload (loud volume, hyper-saturated colors, exaggerated acting, emotional manipulation)
- **Regressive (medium–high severity):** reinforces stereotypes, egocentrism, compulsive consumption, false promises

Aggravating factors:

- **Imposition** (e.g., unskippable pre-rolls)
- **Excessive repetition**
- **Vulnerable targets** (children, elderly, fragile individuals)

If the cumulative score exceeds a certain threshold, the campaign is taxed.

VIRTUOUS CAMPAIGNS

Exempt or rewarded if they:

- Promote health, respect, sustainability
 - Avoid covert pressure or regressive content
 - Align with the company's overall conduct
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USE OF FUNDS

Tax revenue doesn't go to the general budget—it funds:

- Civic education and awareness
- Social and environmental communication
- Inclusive projects

- Purpose-driven cultural content
 - Media literacy training for schools and universities
 - Direct financing of certified campaigns
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START-UP PHASE

12-month pilot:

- Sample campaign analysis
 - Criteria optimization
 - Gradual rollout
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FREQUENTLY (AND UNAVOIDABLY) ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Isn't this censorship?

No. No campaign is banned. It's a compensation system, like environmental pollution taxes.

2. Isn't it too subjective?

It's based on public criteria, expert review, and benchmarks. It's more transparent than most ad algorithms.

3. Won't the cost just fall on consumers?

Not if the market reacts rationally. Good campaigns are rewarded, bad ones pay. Funds go back to the community.

4. Aren't existing rules (e.g., Antitrust) enough?

No. Antitrust tackles clear deception. This targets systemic and cultural effects.

5. Is this only for Italy?

No. It's designed to be adapted across Europe. The modular design and digital backbone make it exportable.

CONCLUSION

This doesn't limit advertising—it makes it accountable.

Regressive messaging gives back to the society it affects. Responsible messaging is rewarded.

Time for advertising to grow up a bit too.

Fammi sapere se vuoi anche una versione *semplificata*, una *presentazione visiva*, o un *riepilogo per policymaker*. Oppure, boh, ricamarci sopra un podcast.