

This article enables students to:

1. understand criticisms about recent political advertisements
2. think critically on whether political advertisements should be allowed



Paying the price

A programme and advert aired recently on Commercial Radio caused citizens to wonder if political advertisements should be broadcast on television and radio.

News

COMMERCIAL Radio Hong Kong (CRHK), one of three radio broadcasters in the city, came under fire when it **broadcast** a weekly programme with the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB) as co-hosts. It also ran lawmaker Emily Lau Wai-hing's radio adverts.

The programme is a weekly four-hour show running for 18 weeks. Five DAB rising stars have joined the programme, in which they and radio personality Andes Yue will visit 18 districts to **engage** with young people in casual chats.

The Broadcasting Authority said it has received dozens of complaints about the DAB-sponsored programme and Lau's advert which promoted the universal suffrage march.

Under the Broadcasting Ordinance, licensed broadcasters are not allowed to carry any advertisements of a religious or political nature.

The pro-Beijing party refused to **disclose** the exact amount of sponsorship money it had given, but party chairman Tam Yiu-chung said the sum is less than HK\$700,000. He emphasised it is not political propaganda but promotes the message of care and love in society.

However, his comments did not convince the pan-democratic camp. Democratic legislator Lee Wing-tat criticised CRHK's actions as unfair to other political parties because of the difference in funds between various parties. He said that would lead to different levels of exposure for other parties who do not appear on TV and radio.

In response to the complaints about her advert, Emily Lau said the complaints were on whether or not Commercial Radio had breached the advertising code on political advertisements. But she did not say if her advert had broken the law.

Vincent Wong Wing, CRHK's director of strategic planning, defended the DAB's sponsorship and said it did not alter the station's **independence**.

Hong Kong Today

THIS is the first time a political party has sponsored broadcasts. Some say it will affect the **impartiality** of broadcasters; others consider it a commercial practice.

Unlike phone-in radio programmes, the DAB-sponsored programme is co-hosted by the rising stars of the party.

In fact, in the first aired programme, the DAB co-host interviewed another DAB District Councillor. Also, two voice clips of DAB lawmakers were broadcast while none of the other political parties appeared in the programme.

However, the Broadcasting Ordinance does not provide a definition of the term "political nature". In practice, broadcasters have to consider whether their advertisement or programme has **breached** the ordinance.

Vincent Wong said he chose to **interpret** the ordinance in a broad sense. He explained this protects freedom of expression. If the public thinks CRHK has violated the ordinance, they can complain to the Broadcasting Authority.

But legislator Audrey Eu Yue-mee said the broadcaster applies double standards. She hosted a weekly talk show for CRHK from 2003 to 2006. But the programme ended in 2006 when she was about to form the Civic Party.



Why have restrictions?

CONSTITUTIONAL minister Stephen Lam Siu-lung said the government does not support the relaxation of the Broadcasting Ordinance, especially during the **electoral** period.



Restriction of political advertisements puts a limit on every candidate. Therefore, rich candidates will not have the extra opportunity to promote themselves during the electoral period.

Moreover, the nature of political parties and private companies are different. It is not easy to compare whether political advertisements should be considered as commercial advertisements.

Also, Commercial Radio is not solely a private company. It is responsible for providing a variety of broadcasting services.



Commercial Radio Hong Kong (CRHK) received sponsorship money from the DAB. Five rising stars of this political party are to co-host a weekly four-hour programme. Together with an advertisement produced by Emily Lau Wai-hing, CRHK was said to have breached the Broadcasting Ordinance by allowing political advertisements.



Key ideas

Party or company?

There is no party registration law in Hong Kong. All political parties are registered as private companies. Therefore, they are not required to reveal their financial status and confidential documents to the public. With limited transparency, we do not know where the political parties get their money and who their donors are.



Did you know?

1. How do you define 'political nature'?
2. Should the programme sponsored by the DAB be considered political propaganda?
3. Did Emily Lau record a political advert?
4. Should the government relax restrictions in the Broadcasting Ordinance?
5. Should broadcasters receive sponsorship money from political parties? Why?



Critical thinking

References

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