



BROADCASTING

Overview

Hong Kong has a vibrant broadcasting sector offering a wide range of services to the community. Hong Kong viewers and listeners have access to over 800 local and overseas television channels in various languages through free-to-air terrestrial and satellite reception or pay television services, and 13 radio channels provided by commercial broadcasters and Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), Hong Kong's public service broadcaster.

The Government's policy objectives are to widen the programme choice for the community, encourage investment and innovation in the broadcasting industry, promote fair and effective competition and enhance Hong Kong's position as a regional broadcasting hub. In order to achieve these objectives, Hong Kong has provided a liberalised, light-handed and pro-competition regulatory environment to facilitate broadcasting services to flourish.

The Communications Authority

The Communications Authority (CA) is an independent statutory body established under the Communications Authority Ordinance (Cap. 616) on 1 April 2012, comprising 10 non-officials from various sectors of the community and two public officers. The CA is a unified regulatory body for the broadcasting and telecommunications industries in Hong Kong. It regulates the broadcasting and telecommunications industries in accordance with the Broadcasting Ordinance (BO), Telecommunications Ordinance, Communications Authority Ordinance, Broadcasting (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance, Trade Descriptions Ordinance and Competition Ordinance. It also enforces the Unsolicited Electronic Messages Ordinance.

Two committees have been set up under the CA to assist it to perform its functions in relation to broadcasting matters. The Broadcast Complaints Committee deals with complaints about broadcasting issues, whereas the Broadcast Codes of Practice Committee reviews the codes of practice on programme, advertising and technical standards for both television and radio services.

The Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA), the CA's executive arm and secretariat, helps the CA administer and enforce the relevant ordinances governing the broadcasting and telecommunications industries.

Television Broadcasting

Regulatory Regime

The Government has adopted a technology-neutral regulatory regime since 2000. Under the BO, the four categories of television programme services, namely domestic free, domestic pay, non-domestic (mainly satellite television services targeting the Asia Pacific region) and other licensable (mainly television services for hotel rooms) television programme services are regulated according to their characteristics and pervasiveness rather than their transmission mode.

There are three domestic free television programme service (free TV) licensees, namely Fantastic Television Limited (Fantastic TV), HK Television Entertainment Company Limited (HKTVE) and Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB). Fantastic TV, HKTVE and TVB, by using frequency spectrum and/or fixed network as transmission mode for the delivery of their free TV services¹, are currently providing three channels in analogue format and eight channels (including simulcasting the three analogue channels) in digital format. The three broadcasters are required to broadcast news, documentary, current affairs, arts and culture programmes and programmes for children (including educational programmes targeting teenagers), young persons and senior citizens. HKTVE and TVB, which use frequency

spectrum as transmission mode, are also required to broadcast programmes provided by RTHK, the public service broadcaster that produces TV and radio programmes.

The market of pay television has been fully liberalised since 2000. There are currently two domestic pay television programme service (pay TV) licensees, namely Hong Kong Cable Television Limited and PCCW Media Limited. Pay TV services are subject to less content regulation but it is a statutory requirement that the service provider must provide a locking device to protect minors from accessing contents for adults. Pay TV operators may provide their services via multiple transmission means, e.g. hybrid fibre coaxial cable, microwave, satellite, broadband network, etc.

Hong Kong viewers now enjoy a diversity of programmes on pay television. The number of pay TV channels provided by licensees has increased to more than 300 from only eight when pay TV was first launched in 1993. The household penetration rate of pay TV services is over 85%². Pay TV operators are also providing better services, for example, all the pay TV platforms are now fully digitised. Some operators have launched innovative services such as ultra high-definition television, 3D and interactive programmes.

Hong Kong positions itself as the broadcasting hub of the Asia Pacific region. It is also an ideal place for uplinking satellite television services to the Asia Pacific region due to its proximity to the Mainland China, excellent infrastructure, freedom of speech and pool of talents. Currently, there are 15 non-domestic television programme service licensees providing over 180 satellite television channels for the Asia Pacific region.

The Government adopts an “open sky” policy. Through satellite master antenna television (SMATV) and television receive only systems, Hong Kong people are able to receive free of charge unencrypted satellite television programme channels uplinked from Hong Kong and elsewhere. There are now over 400 such free-to-air satellite television channels available for reception in Hong Kong. About 890 000 premises in multi-storey buildings have access to satellite channels through their SMATV systems. Typically, they can receive about 10 satellite channels.

Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT)

The terrestrial broadcasters successfully launched DTT service on 31 December 2007. Since then,

the terrestrial broadcasters have constructed a total of 29 transmitting stations by phases, bringing the overall DTT coverage to at least 99% of Hong Kong households by September 2013, which is on par with that of the analogue television broadcasting.

The Government encourages the viewing public to switch to DTT to enjoy its benefits. According to a public survey conducted from August to October 2017, about 88% of the households in Hong Kong are receiving DTT.

The Government has launched a dedicated digital TV website to raise public awareness of DTT and promote consumer education. The website (www.digitaltv.gov.hk) contains relevant information about digital TV including a database of DTT service coverage and a list of registered DTT receivers under OFCA's labelling scheme.

In December 2014, in view of the latest development of DTT and technical considerations, the Government decided to revise the working target for switching off analogue television broadcasting from end 2015 to end 2020, with a review of the target date to be conducted in 2017-18.

Sound Broadcasting

There are 13 local analogue radio channels serving the Hong Kong listeners. Seven of them are operated by the public service broadcaster - RTHK. The remaining six channels are operated by two commercial broadcasters, namely Hong Kong Commercial Broadcasting Company Limited (CRHK) and Metro Broadcast Corporation Limited (Metro), each broadcasting three channels.

CRHK commenced broadcasting in 1959. Another commercial radio broadcaster, Metro, commenced broadcasting in 1991. Each station runs three analogue channels and is required to provide balanced entertainment, informative and educational programmes. The radio channels broadcast news and weather reports, current affairs, arts and culture programmes and programmes for young persons, senior citizens and children. Programmes in Hindi, Tagalog, and Thai are also broadcast to cater for the needs of ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong.

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¹ In April 2015, HKTVE was granted a free TV licence to provide free TV service by using a fixed network as its transmission mode. In January 2016, the CA approved HKTVE's application for using frequency spectrum, on top of fixed network, as an additional means of transmission for the delivery of its free TV service.

² Penetration of licensed pay TV services is calculated by dividing the total number of subscribers of licensed pay TV services by the total number of households. Some subscribers are counted more than once if they subscribe to more than one pay TV service.