

Chapter 18

Learning From Abroad on SIM Card Registration Policy: The Case of Malawi

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an analysis of policy transfer in the context of a developing country. The case of Malawi was analyzed as an African country attempting to implement a mandatory subscriber identity module (SIM) card registration policy. The study used a qualitative research approach and secondary data including government reports and media reports. The findings showed that the SIM card registration policy was transferred through coercive transfer to meet security standards and international conventions, and voluntary transfer to address local social challenges related to the use of mobile technologies. Despite initiating the SIM card registration process on several occasions, the implementation process was met with constraints related to social, economic, and political factors that affected the policy transfer process.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile technologies have become more accessible and affordable across the continent of Africa. It is estimated that there are about 759 million users of mobile phones in Africa (ITU, 2017). Mobile phones are improving communication for individuals and organisations, access to information and services such as financial services (for instance banking, money transfer and insurance) and public services (health, education, agriculture and managing the environment). Further mobile phones have been heralded in creating employment opportunities and redressing social ills in communities, such as social exclusion. It is, therefore, not surprising that mobile phones are in a way influencing the social and economic conditions of many people in African countries (Ojo, Janowski & Awotwi, 2013; Shaik & Karjaluoto, 2015).

While there are potential benefits to be derived from the use mobile phones, some critics have argued that mobile phones are also being used in criminal activities that pose a threat to the well-being of the citizens (Ahmed, Hague, Guha et al., 2017; Ajayi, 2014; Donovan & Martin, 2012). For example, mo-

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mobile phones are being used in crimes such as kidnapping, terrorism, drug and human trafficking (Ajayi, 2014). Further, mobile phones are used in activities related to hate speech, glorification of violence, cyber laundering and SMS phishing and spamming (Aririguzo, & Agbaraji, 2016; Donovan & Martin, 2012). To remedy some of the challenges, African governments have adopted mandatory SIM card registration policies where all prepaid mobile phones users are required to register their personal identifiable data for their active SIM cards (Hemeson, 2012; Donovan & Martin, 2012; Jentzsch, 2012).

SIM card registration policy, like other public technology, is “a set of actions that affect the generation, acquisition, adaptation, diffusion and use of technological knowledge in a way that government deems useful for society rather than the individual” (Ghazinoory, Divsalar & Soofi, 2008:836). The SIM card registration policies may be transferred through lesson drawing, voluntary and coercive approaches (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). The majority of African countries (48 out of the 54 countries) have adopted the mandatory SIM card registration policies in response to the ratification of international and regional conventions for security (Jentzsch, 2012). There are consequently few countries without the mandatory SIM card registration policy (Donovan & Martin, 2014).

This study focuses on the context of Malawi, which is an example of a low-income economy in Africa. The country has not yet implemented the mandatory SIM card registration policy. It was interesting to note how the country will learn about SIM card registration policy from other countries and develop an understanding of technology policy transfer, and the challenges and opportunities of the SIM card registration policy. The study was guided by the research question: How are mandatory SIM card policies adopted in the countries without SIM card registration? The study was important in addressing the paucity of studies on technology policy transfer in the context of African countries (Donovan & Martin, 2012). The study may serve to inform policymakers and practitioners on issues that can inhibit the success of the SIM card registration in the countries without the policy.

POLICY TRANSFER

Policy transfer may be viewed from many perspectives depending on the context of the study. The different perspectives may include policy diffusion, policy convergence and policy transfer (Marsh & Sharman, 2009). To appreciate the differences the description of each term are summarised as follows:

- **Policy diffusion:** The process in which policy choices in one country affect those made in another country (Braud & Gilardi, 2006). Policy diffusion emphasises the roles of the structures of the policy process rather than the agents involved in the policy transfer (Marsh & Sharman, 2009);
- **Policy convergence:** The process in which policies in two or more countries become more alike over a period of time (Knill, 2005);
- **Policy transfer:** The process in which “*knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past and present) is used in development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting*” (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000:5).

The study used the term ‘policy transfer’ (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000) to clarify the process of policy transfer for mandatory SIM card registration. The perspective of policy transfer is considered appropriate because it is more encompassing and addresses both agency and structure that are interactive and

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