An Exploratory Study on Policy Transfer for SIM Card Registration in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

Majority of African countries have adopted policies for mandatory Subscriber Identifiable Module (SIM) card registration to mitigate security threats to citizens and society. However, there are few countries that have not yet adopted the mandatory SIM card registration policies. This study investigated the means through which SIM card registration policy may be transferred in countries without the policy. The context of Malawi was analysed which represented an ideal case of an African country without mandatory SIM card registration policy. The findings showed that the mandatory SIM card registration policy may be transferred through: (a) voluntary transfer to address local challenges related to mobile technologies (b) coercive transfer in response to meet international agreements. However, lack of national identification documents for mobile phone users and delays in implementing legal framework affected the transfer of the mandatory SIM Card registration in Malawi. It will be necessary to consider of social, economic and political factors when adopting the mandatory SIM card registration policy.

Keywords: Developing Countries, Malawi, Mobile Phone Users, Policy Transfer, SIM Card Registration

1. INTRODUCTION

The increase in adoption of mobile phones in Africa has brought about changes in social and economic conditions of many people in developing countries (Mansell, 2014). Mobile phones have improved communications, access to high-quality networks, markets and services such as healthcare, financial services, education and agriculture (Kelly & Minges, 2012). Although there are many benefits attributed to mobile phones, there are also potential harmful use of mobile phones to society such as supporting activities like kidnapping, terrorism and drug trafficking (Donavan & Martin, 2012). To mitigate some of the challenges for use of mobile phones such as supporting criminal activities, African governments have adopted policies that require all prepaid mobile phone users to register their personal identifiable data for their active SIM cards (Jentzsch, 2012; Hemeson, 2012).

Public policy in the context of this study is defined as “a set of government actions that affect the generation, acquisition, adaptation, diffusion and use of technological knowledge in a way that government deems useful for the

DOI: 10.4018/IJTD.2015010102
society rather than the individual” (Ghazinoory, Divsalar & Soofi, 2008: 836). An example of public policy related to mobile technologies is the mandatory SIM card registration policy. The policy, like other public policies, may diffuse through lesson drawing, voluntary and coercive means (Dolowit & Marsh, 2000). The mandatory SIM card registration policies have diffused across countries in the continent of Africa. It is estimated that 48 out of 54 countries in Africa have adopted the mandatory SIM card registration policy (Martin & Donavan, 2014). The countries adopted the policy in response to agreements signed with intergovernmental organisations and in some cases countries have voluntarily adopted the SIM card registration policies (Jentzsch, 2012; Makulilo, 2011).

The study focused on the context of Malawi which is an example of the few countries in Africa without the mandatory SIM card registration policy. The study was aimed at investigating means through which SIM card registration policy may be transferred and was guided by the research question: How are mandatory SIM card policies adopted in for countries without SIM card registration? The study was important for two reasons. First, the study contributes toward literature on technology policy transfer in context of Africa. Second, the study explored to understand issues on SIM card registration policies which may serve to inform policymakers and practitioners in countries without such policies.

The rest of the paper is presented as follows. Section 2 summarises the background to the study. Section 3 presents theoretical background to the study. Section 4 outlines the methodology for the study. Section 5 summarises the results for the documentary review. Section 6 discusses the results and conclusions drawn from the study.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Mandatory SIM card registration can be described as the process of recording mobile phones with their personal details for active prepaid SIM cards (Jentzsch, 2012). Personal data such as name, physical address and contact details are recorded and stored on a database. In some cases, biometric data i.e. photograph and finger prints are also recorded (Donavan & Martin, 2012). Identification of the mobile phone users is crucial in the SIM registration process.

Governments across the globe initiated policies to combat crimes and prevent fraud as a result of the terrorist attack of USA on 9th September, 2001. Some of the measures were introduction of Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) (Chatain, Zerzan, Noor, Dannaoui, de Koker, 2011). The Financial Action Task Force was responsible for setting standards for AML/CFT. The standards require consumers to take reasonable steps when making single payment for cash transactions. This relate to Know Your Customer (KYC) procedures so that transactions can be identified. Part of implementation of KYC involves enacting national laws and regulations which require verification of identity of customers and their physical addresses (Johnson, 2008; Makulilo, 2011). The increase in mobile phone adoption and use of mobile payments has led to consideration for mandatory SIM registration in African countries (Chatain et al., 2011).

Intergovernmental organisations have promoted the transfer of AML/CFT policies across the globe. At regional level, regional bodies have influenced policy transfer across countries for SIM card registration. For example, the East African Communication Organisation (EACO) supported the SIM card registration policy transfer for countries in East Africa (Jentzsch, 2012). The mandatory SIM registration involved passing of legislations, regulations and procedures in recording personal data of active mobile phone consumers. The SIM card policy implementation was achieved through collaboration of government, regulators and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs). The main role of government was in passing the laws to support the mandatory SIM card registration.
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