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Editorial

Special issue: Papers from the 39th Research Conference on Communication, Information and Internet Policy (TPRC 2011)

The fall of 2011 marked the 39th anniversary of the annual Research Conference on Communication, Information and Internet Policy, also known as TPRC (www.tprc.org). In recent years the conference has been held annually in the early fall in the Washington, DC area. Participants include academics, policy makers and private sector executives who present and debate research on a variety of policy, technical and societal issues.

The 2011 conference received 228 abstract submissions, of which roughly 90 were accepted. Submissions came primarily from academia (77%), followed by government (13%), other (5%), civil society (4%), and industry (1%). The majority were from authors submitting to TPRC for the first time, with 60% having never previously presented at the conference. Overall, 45% were from authors outside the U.S., enhancing dialog on international issues and providing international perspectives, as evidenced by the papers in this special issue.

The papers showcased here were submitted in response to an open call to all TPRC presenters. Having received two rounds of review, the papers benefitted from the detailed suggestions of our reviewers. Thanks to those who volunteered. The resulting seven papers demonstrate the complex predictors, consequences and limitations of policies and regulations. Of the seven, three papers include analyses of policies affecting underserved populations—whether in technologically developing or developed nations, while a second group of four provides detailed analyses of policies and regulations in markets for established and emerging technologies.

Taken together, the three papers with analyses of underserved populations highlight the differences in policy outcomes that may accrue in technologically developed versus developing nations, the level of heterogeneity in governance among developing nations, as well as heterogeneity of the underserved in a developed nation. For example, Gulati and Yates, compare broadband diffusion between developed and developing nations and find that while in developed nations the presence of a national telecom regulatory authority has no significant effect on broadband diffusion, in developing nations the effect is negative. Differentiating policy and regulatory contexts further, Jayakar and Martin examine predictors of regulatory governance in Africa. Their analysis, performed on diverse African nation states, finds a nation's resource endowments may predict the quality of general governance, but these endowments appear to have no bearing on the quality of telecommunications governance in particular. Their subsequent analyses identify differences between general governance and telecommunications governance that might explain this result. These two papers are complemented by the work of Gideon who finds maintaining service to underserved populations in the United States requires policies focused not only on access, but also on business models that can exacerbate the challenges of poverty, such as irregular income.

The second group of papers investigates the consequences of policies and regulations for markets in both established and emerging technologies. Zaber and Sirbu find elements of spectrum management policies have different effects on diffusion of 3G mobile. For example, examining the effects of multiple standards, band mandates (assigning a specific band for a specific technology) and use of auctions, the authors found whereas multiple standards delay the rollout of 3G, there is no effect on the growth rate. Conversely, band mandates help establish a rapid rollout but eventually reduce the growth rate. As concerns the use of auctions, the research found no evidence they inhibit diffusion. Also examining markets for established technologies, Infante and Vellejo examine the effects of mobile roaming regulations in Europe. Their research highlights the difficulties of achieving desired policy outcomes, demonstrating that despite wholesale price regulation of international roaming in Europe, consumers do not always benefit. Moving to new technologies such as cognitive and software defined radio, the paper by Matheson and Morris recommends a policy framework for spectrum rights to move from a command and control to a market oriented system. In the proposed framework regulators govern interference and allocation of resources through Coasian negotiation between the license holders, and avoids stipulating specifications on receivers. The final paper in this group examines the emerging market for Ultra-Fast Broadband (UFB) in New Zealand. The

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author, Fernando Beltran, applies the theory of two-sided markets in an analysis of the likely market structure for retail service.

These insightful papers highlight the need for a robust discipline of telecommunication policy, where under-examined contexts, new technologies and new business models require new theories and approaches to policy design and implementation. We hope you will join us in this endeavor at the 2012 meeting of TPRC, to be held from September 21–23, at the George Mason University School of Law, in Arlington, VA, USA.

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