

SUB-REGIONAL CONFERENCE on the DEVELOPMENT of **DIGITAL ECONOMY** for CENTRAL AFRICAN countries

organised in Cameroon by ITU

T H E M E The Digital Economy in Central Africa: Current situation and challenges in a globalised world

> YAOUNDE CONFERENCE CENTRE 23-25 MAY 2018

# GENERAL REPORT

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### I. Introduction

At the initiative of the International Telecommunication Union, the Subregional conference on digital economy for Central African countries took place from 23 to 25 May 2018 at the Yaoundé Conference Centre, under the theme: **"The Digital Economy in Central Africa: Current situation and challenges in a globalised world".** With the participation of the ITU Secretary General, the Ministers of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications of the Republic of Cameroon, some members of government of the Republic of Cameroon, the Secretary General of the African Telecommunication Union (ATU), the Secretary General of the Pan African Postal Union (PAPU), representatives of International Organisations like ITU, ICANN, ADB, ECA, ECCAS and CEMAC, representatives of the Ministries in charge of telecommunications and ICTs of the subregion and experts from Cameroon, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ghana. In a nutshell, over 200 participants took part in the works of the conference.

This report present the different items of the conference, especially those based on:

- the opening ceremony;
- the digital salon;
- Ministers' closed doors meeting;
- the works of the experts;
- meeting of regulators;
- closing ceremony.

# II. Opening Ceremony

The official opening ceremony was marked by four (04) presentations:

- the welcome address of the Representative of the Government Delegate of the Yaounde Urban Council;
- the address of the Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea;
- the address of the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications of Cameroon;
- the opening speech of the Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union;
- the opening lesson.

1. The welcome address of the Representative of the Government Delegate of the Yaounde Urban Council

**Mr Dieudonné MBARGA**, Representative of the Government Delegate of the Yaoundé Urban Council, extended a hearty welcome to all participants who made it in the beautiful city of Yaoundé, which is also one of the main government decision making centres for Central African countries. He stressed on the fact that this subregional conference on digital economy development, that stems from the desire of ITU and the Cameroon government, is geared at combining efforts as well as all the achievements of Central African Countries with respect to digital technology, in order to establish an integrated digital ecosystem.

He pointed out that the theme of this conference is expressive enough and concerns all stakeholders of the socio-political, economic and cultural life of each country of the area. Moreover, it calls for the synergy of forces in favour of the digitalisation of our economies, with the aim of optimising results and speeding up the advent of an emerging Central Africa.

After presenting the host city of the conference within its geographical location, its cultural values and its cosmopolitan nature, the speaker expressed his deep appreciations to ITU for honouring Cameroon by enabling it to organise this very important meeting.

To conclude his address, he urged all participants to do everything possible to materialise their contributions.

# 2. Address of the Minister of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea

Mr Eucario Bakale Angue Oyana, Minister of Transport, Posts and Telecommunications of the Republic of the Equatorial Guinea seized the opportunity to express his gratitude to Mrs Minette LIBOM LI LIKENG, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications of the Republic of Cameroon, for organising this meeting to which the Equatorial Guinea has been invited.

He also expressed his appreciations to his Cameroonian counterpart for inviting him to the official ceremony of the cable laying of the first meter of the Cameroon-Brazil submarine cable, on 22 May 2018, in the City of Kribi.

His thanks also went to the ITU for organising this first edition of the subregional conference on digital economy development.

He underscored that the Internet policies of our countries must consider:

- the pillars of digital economy;
- the requirements of digital ecosystem;
- attaining of the socio-economic development goals.

After recalling the investment efforts made by its country in the development of this sector, namely the construction of the ACE submarine cables, Main One and the Optical fibre national backbone, he acknowledged that these investments are still insufficient if:

- the Internet penetration rate is still low;
- the broadband cost is still high;
- private investment is still embryonic.

He ended his address by calling for the very much needed international and regional cooperation in the ICT sector.

# 3. Address of Her Excellency the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications of Cameroon

After wishing a warm welcome to all experts and participants who came to contribute to the movement of Central African Countries toward digital emergence, Mrs Minette LIBOM LI LIKENG, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications of Cameroon, expressed her profound gratitude to the ITU's Secretary General, for chosen Cameroon to host the ever first edition of the series of ITU subregional rotative conferences on Digital Economy Development in Africa.

She pointed out that the rapidly changing evolution of Internet strongly requires, the consolidation of subregional cooperation in order to provide some support to countries that need it. In this regard, the ITU rotative subregional conferences on digital economy development in Africa, falls within the framework of the support of the telecommunication governing organisation to African States, in a bid to stimulate the development of this sector, so that they could contribute to speed up growth and economic development.

The Minister qualified the presence of the ITU's Secretary General as major asset for this meeting, as it gives more credit to these works and honours Cameroon and Africa as a whole.

She presented the objectives of the conference as follows:

- presenting the current state of digital economy in each country of the subregion;
- examining the best options for a relevant and sustainable digital economy development in the subregion;

- reviewing the conditions for a better deployment of ITU support and that of other financial backers to the subregion;
- engaging financials backers in the financing of digital economy development projects in the subregion;
- reviewing harmonisation areas of the ICT regulatory frameworks within the ECCAS economic area;
- defining the basis for a harmonisation of electronic communication regulation in the subregion;
- showcasing the assets of digital economy in the subregion, including the innovations of startupers;
- exchanging on technological advancement and new problems in the digital domain.

To conclude, she recalled and commended, the endeavours of the Cameroon government with regards to digital economic development, efforts stimulated by the Head of State, His Excellency **Paul Biya**, through two keynote addresses that stands today as compass for the country. This Conference is a response to the political will and the commitment of the subregion States to understand the changes needed for the development of digital economy, these changes are answers to concerns relating to technological, industrial, social and ecological development.

# 4. Opening Speech of the Secretary General of ITU

Mr Houlin ZHAO, Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union, thanked the Cameroon Government for the warm welcome provided to him. After presenting the important role played by the development of digital economy in the world at large and in Africa in particular, he lauded the vision of President **Paul BIYA**, geared at boosting the development of digital economy by inviting the youth and women to take ownership of ICTs in a bid to transform it into a growth tool and a job creation mechanism.

He pointed out he counted amongst his priority actions, the development of infrastructure, investment, innovation and social inclusion. He emphasized that these four areas are the core of ITU strategy to bridge the digital divide. He urged Central African Countries to review areas like artificial intelligence, big data, Internet of Things, electronic commerce, e-learning, e-health and e-government that are areas where innovation provides actual economic prospects.

He ended his communication by inviting the countries to come together to support Central African entrepreneurs and startupers, who are actors acting as growth, innovation and job creation drivers.

# 5. Opening Lesson of Prof Jean-Emmanuel PONDI

Under the moderation of Mr Armand Claude ABANDA, Resident Representative of the African Institute of Computer Science (IAI) and General Moderator of the Event, this lesson focused on the theme "Digital Economy and Subregional integration: which levers for a sustainable development in Central Africa?".

The speaker of the day, Prof Jean-Emmanuel PONDI centred his communication on the positioning of Africa as a power in the global digital scene. He stressed on understanding of the basics of digital economy as an asset for building subregional integration. He depicted an overview of the current situation of ICTs in the ECCAS area, underscoring the indispensable conditions that allow the speeding up of digital economy development within the ECCAS area. He presented the potential of Central Africa with respect to energy as the bedrock of digital economy development.

Prof PONDI highlighted three main challenges that faced in Countries of the Central African subregion with respect to the digital economy development, that is:

- digitalisation that refers to the development of infrastructure;
- the content of innovation terms:
- the conceptualisation with respect to the counting of Africa's needs as well as providers of these needs.

He concluded his presentation by advocating the use of the global context to seek local solution, through the development of strategies requiring innovation, creativity and determination.

# III. Digital salon

The digital salon, organised throughout this Subregional Conference, with the participation of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, sectoral regulatory board, telephone operators, services suppliers and providers as well as start-ups of the digital sector were displayed in the stands provided for this purpose.

This salon was solemnly inaugurated, with a symbolic cutting of the ribbon, by the ITU's Secretary General accompanied by Ministers of P&T of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea as well as other invited personalities.

This forum was an opportunity to display to the public the know-how of in Cameroonian digital enterprises with regards to technological innovation.

#### IV. Ministers' closed doors meeting

The Ministers' closed doors meeting took place on 23 May 2018, in the meeting hall A of the Yaoundé Conference Centre. This meeting brought together the ITU's Secretary General, the Ministers of the Republics of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, the Secretaries General of ATU and PAPU, the representatives of ECCAS, CEMAX and ECA as well as the representatives of the Ministers in charge of ICTs of the Republics of Chad, Rwanda and Central Africa.

The rapporteur for these works was the representative of the International Telecommunication Union Area Office for Central Africa and Madagascar.

These works were marked by the signing of the Yaounde Commitment that basically gives mandate to participating countries on the one hand, to coordinate the implementation of some subregional federating projects and on the other hand, to pursuit the collaboration in order to reconcile positions on the items recorded on the agenda of international meetings, in a bid to achieve common proposals.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea accepted to organise, in collaboration with CEMAC/ECCAS, the next ministerial meeting, preceded by a meeting of experts, to assess the implementation of these federating projects.

### V. Works of experts

The works of experts were organised in plenary sessions around seven (07) panels and two (02) round tables.

# V.1 Panel No. 1: Experience of countries of the Subregion in digital economy development

Moderated by Prof. **Grégoire MEBADA**, the purpose of this panel was to make an update per country of the subregion, of achievements, weaknesses and major evolutions while highlighting the role of the State, the legal context, the place of stakeholders, the level of infrastructure development.

Three presentations were made by experts from Cameroon, Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea.

In short, it appears that despite the efforts made by governments, the subregion is will very poor positioned in international classifications. Several inclusion initiatives were pointed out, for instance the interconnection between Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. The connection with CAR was also provided.

With regard to the difficulties, the speaker pointed out that:

- the investment made on infrastructure development is important but still remain **insufficient** both quantitatively and qualitatively.
- the need of the populations are ever increasingly changing.
- the Digital Access Index of States is still below the average value;
- the e-Government Development Index of States is located about the average level.

At the end of the exchanges and various concerns highlighted, the panel acknowledged that some progress were done but are till remain disparate with respect to infrastructure development, local content related namely, to the lack of qualified human resources.

It was recommended that State should double their efforts in the areas of:

- development of a quality sub-regional interconnection infrastructure;
- training of appropriate human resources;
- production of local contents;
- inclusion and better cooperation in a bid to boost the collective economic development of the subregion

# V.2 Panel No. 2: Role of international organisations in the development of digital economy and the financing of projects in Central Africa (ITU, ECA, WB, ADB, ICANN)

Moderated by Mr Parfait SIKI, Journalist and Consultant, this session gave room to the following organisations: ITU, ADB, ECA and ICANN to each present, their role, the current level of support and the prospects of digital economy financing in Central Africa.

It clearly appears from these presentations that the above organisations are ready to support and assist digital economy development in the subregion through training, project financing and technical support.

# V.3 Panel No. 3: "Digital economy as an important leverage in the establishment of a continental free trade area"

Moderated by Mr Thierry NDONG, Publication Manager of the News Paper known as "l'Intégration", the purpose of this panel was to highlight actions that enable the achievement of subregional integration via ICTs.

The related presentation was made by Mr Pierre Dandjinou Vice-President of ICANN for Africa. In his presentation, the speaker made a quick reminder of the free

trade agreement signed at Kigali in March 2018 and stress on the use of the IPv6 addresses by our countries in a bid to drive more innovation.

At the end of the discussions, the panel made following recommendations:

- setting up a digital African platform for services;
- the digitalisation of SME-SMI administration chain;
- the adaptation of training to digital requirements;
- the adoption of an integrated vision of States on digital technologies.

# V.4 Panel No. 4: "Artificial intelligence, big data and development of digital economy: challenges and prospects for the subregion"

Moderated by Prof Nadine MACHIKOU, the purpose of this panel is to show the new trends and major Internet evolutions as well as their potential impact on the development of digital economy in Central Africa.

The related presentation was done by Dr MFUH Winfred FUAYE KENJI, Technical Adviser No. 2 at MINPOSTEL.

After defining the concept of Artificial Intelligent and Big data, he pointed out the implementation areas of technologies applied in this domain, the limits of their use, the challenges and development prospects for the subregion.

The exchanges focused on concerns related to training, regulation harmonisation and adequate infrastructure.

At end of the exchanges, the panel recommended that the endeavours of States be centred on a better regulation of the activities of this sector. In this respect, there is need:

- to invest in capacity building;
- to increase data digitalisation, the coordination and the concerted fight against cybercrime;
- to protect personal data, by proceeding with legal and regulatory developments.

### V.5 Panel No. 5: "Wastes of digital technology, impact of electromagnetic radiation on health and the environment - Which strategy for Central Africa? "

The purpose of this panel moderated by Prof. Nadine MACHIKOU, was to raise awareness of the various stakeholders on the negative impacts of e-waste and make proposals that could enable their recycling.

The presentation made by Mr. Jean-Jacques MASSIMA, the ITU Resident Representative for Central Africa and Madagascar highlighted the following observations:

- the increase of electronic waste with harmful consequences on the human body;
- the reduction of digital product life cycle due to the increase of the number of users;
- the increase in various diseases associated with digital waste; and
- the danger of the radiation emitted by electronic equipment on humans.

At the end of the discussions, the panel made the following recommendations:

- draw on experiences of other countries in this area so as to develop suitable policies and strategies;
- organise ad hoc consultations;
- create working groups likely to brainstorm on the legislation and make proposals to governments;
- develop and harmonise policies on waste management in the subregion ;
- sensitise people on the use of mobile terminals.

# V.6 Panel No. 6: "Financial inclusion in a digital world"

This panel moderated by Prof. Nadine MACHIKOU identified the following constraints through the presentation of Mr Michel ELAME, Associate Partner Execution Consulting Ltd:

- the lack of physical access to financial institutions because banks find it difficult to open branches everywhere (a matter of interest and profit);
- the excessive cost of the product due to the minimum requirements for the branch opening;
- misunderstanding of procedures used at financial institutions and their products by users;
- the general mistrust of users in banking institutions.

The presentation of the Panel was followed by the intervention of the PAPU's Secretary General who addressed the issue of postal financial inclusion.

After establishing the balance sheet of financial inclusion in Africa, the speaker highlighted the role of PAPU and the African Union in its development and the challenges it encounters.

After exchanges, the Panel made the following recommendations:

- encourage States of the subregion to set up a national strategy for financial inclusion;
- sensitise policy makers, regional and sub-regional organisations, regulatory bodies and among other things, give priority to financial inclusion ;
- sensitise the population and all stakeholders to the use and mastery of financial inclusion, especially the culture of savings;
- promote the creation of e-commerce platforms and online services;
- urge operators to speed up the digitalisation of their network, by introducing innovative products at affordable prices for the greatest number.

# V.7 Panel No. 7: "Blockchain and transformation of the digital economy: Stakes and Challenges for Central Africa"

Presented by Dr. NII QUAYNOR, a Senior Expert from Ghana, under the moderation of Mr Parfait SIKI, Journalist and Consultant, the aim of this presentation was to propose mechanisms for the adoption of a cryptocurrency in Central Africa.

After defining Blockchain as a storage technology and transparent and secured information transmission that operate following a mutual consensus principle without resorting to a third party control or intermediate body, the speaker presented the advantages and challenged on the use of a cryptocurrency or a virtual currency.

At the end of the exchanges, recommendations were adopted as follows:

- educate and sensitise the population on the positive effects of blockchain technologies;
- sensitise African Central Banks and the Governments on the advantages of this technology.

The panel concluded with a series of five presentations made by various Cameroonian startupers who highlighted the following constraints which impede the development of their activities. Among these constraints, they are:

- the lack of finance and difficult access to credit;
- difficulties related to institutional support;
- the lack of human resource skills;
- fierce competition of Digital Giants;
- difficulties to settle in other African countries.

For a harmonious development of start-ups, the panel made the following recommendations:

- ease access to financing for young entrepreneurs;
- explore the informal sector which could be a vast source of fund-raising for start-ups;
- adapt trainings to digital requirements.

# V.8 Round Table No.1: "Stakes and challenges of Internet international exchanges"

Moderated by Dr MFUH Winfred Fuaye Kenji, this round table focused on the below three (03) themes:

- Internet Global Flow and tariff aspects;
- Impact of clusters and place of Central Africa in digital international exchanges
- Security challenges of the Central Africa cyberspace.

The exchanges basically focused on the issue of Internet Exchange Point (IXP), for which difficulties regarding operationalisation have to do with:

- procedures that should clarify the responsibilities of the various members in their management of IXP;
- the need for pooling this infrastructure;
- strengthening of cybersecurity through a collaborative approach.

To this end, the panel recommends pursuing of the establishment of Internet Exchange Points and their pooling, in order to create a sub-regional ecosystem and reduce the costs of Internet traffic between Member States.

# V.9 Round Table No.2: "Harmonisation of the ICT regulatory framework in ECCAS"

Moderated by Mr. Simon LACEY, Vice President of Global Government Affairs, Huawei Technologies, this round table focused on three (03) presentations:

- Interconnection of countries of the subregion and roaming by Mr. Laurent Giuseppe D'Aronco of ECA-SRO-CA;
- Subregional initiatives to harmonize regulatory frameworks by Mrs. Pauline TSAFACK, MINPOSTEL-Cameroon;
- Strategy for the Harmonization of Regulatory Frameworks of the Central African Subregion by Mr NDUKUMA ADJAYI KODJO of the DRC, Doctor in Digital Economy.

In general, calls are very expensive and represent a barrier to the subregional integration.

To speed up the process of setting up free roaming in ECCAS, it has been recommended the following:

### > Member States:

- to create a subregional committee in charge of implementing roaming; to adopt common strategies for reducing tariffs and implementing roaming agreements on mobile networks;
- to set up a watch observatory in compliance with the Community regulations regarding roaming

# > Regulators:

- to implement the decision of Telecommunications/ICT Ministers of ECCAS Member States in a bid to harmonize and reduce roaming tariffs;
- to develop and implement a regional MOU that regulates the technical, tariff and legal aspects of roaming.

Considering the fact that Central African countries belong to two sub-regional groups: CEMAC and ECCAS, there were problems of incompatibility at the level of the legal and regulatory frameworks governing electronic communications.

The panel thus recommends that States put in place a single area that governs directives, regulations and decisions which are binding on member countries.

With regard to the presentation on the Strategy for the Harmonisation of Regulatory Frameworks for the Central African Subregion, the panel made recommendations on the:

- adoption of Single Market Public Policies;
- harmonization of national ICT regulations and legislation;
- adoption of multisectoral regulation of coexisting areas or sectors.

# VI. Meeting of regulators

The panel devoted for regulators of Central Africa focused on the theme "Harmonization of the regulation of electronic communications: frequency management, roaming and pricing, quality of service and specifications of concession operators" whose introductory session focused on the sharing of experiences related to the reflection on the present-day big issues that challenge the regulation of electronic communications in their respective countries

Moderated by Mr ZOO ZAME Philemon, General Manager of TRB, Cameroon, the panel after underscoring the absence of a coordinated regulation suggested the revitalisation of Telecommunication Regulators' Association of Central Africa (ARTAC).

The other topics focused on:

- border frequency coordination and harmonization of positions on key issues for the 2019 World Radio Communications (WRC-19);
- cross-border roaming and pricing of communication services;
- the quality of service and specifications of the operators.

Moderated by Mr. ZOUMRBA Aboubakar, Deputy Managing Director of TRB of Cameroon, the panel stressed the importance of conducting negotiations and an anticipatory approach for a use without harmful interference of frequencies at border areas.

In addition, on issues relating to cross-border roaming and the pricing of communication services, the panelists raised the issue of the level of pricing and the harmonization of these tariffs in Central Africa.

Regarding the quality of service and specifications of the operators, the panel presented indicators that can measure the quality of service. In addition, they noted the lack of tools useful to measure the quality of experience in some countries.

At the end of the discussions, the following recommendations were made:

- a mandate was given to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to convene a meeting to relaunch the activities of ARTAC from 06 to 07 August 2018;
- consideration by Cameroon TRB of the reminder of ARCEP of Chad to sign the revised Chad-Cameroon coordination agreement;
- establishment of a subregional working group for the preparation of WRC-19 during the ARCEP meeting in Malabo;
- establishment of a Subregional Working Group for the implementation of the recommendations on cross-border frequency coordination;
- extension of the Maroua coordination agreement to all other frequencies likely to have harmful impact;
- invitation from other Central African countries to follow the example of the Chad-Cameroon coordination agreement;
- taking into account of the aspect of quality of experience in service quality assessment.

# VII. Closing ceremony of the Conference

This ceremony was marked by:

- the reading of the conference's recommendations;
- the reading and signature of the Yaounde Commitment;
- the closing address of the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications of Cameroon;

After the perusal of the conference's recommendations and the Yaoundé Commitment by Mr PENDA EKOKA, an International Consultant and General Rapporteur of the works, the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications gave the closing address of the conference marked with general satisfaction be it at the level of participation, organisation or at the level of content of works.

#### VIII. Recommendations

At the end of works, the Subregional conference on digital economy for Central African countries, organised by the ITU from 23 to 25 May 2018 at the Yaoundé Conference Centre, under the theme: "Digital Economy in Central Africa: Current situation and challenges in a globalised world", recommended the implementation of the following actions:

- the signing of the Yaoundé Commitment;

- the adoption of an integrated vision of States on Digital technologies;
- development of a quality sub-regional interconnection infrastructure;
- production of local contents;
- setting up a digital African platform for services;
- the digitalisation of SME-SMI administration chain;
- the adaptation of trainings and capacity building to digital requirements;
- the coordination and concerted fight against cybercrime;
- the protection of personal data, by making legal and regulatory arrangements; the adoption of appropriate policies and strategies based on other countries experiences;
- the development and harmonisation of policies on waste management;
- the sensitisation of people on the use of mobile terminals.
- encouraging States in the subregion to put in place a national strategy for financial inclusion;
- the sensitisation of policy makers, regional and sub-regional organisations, regulatory bodies, and among other things, giving priority to financial inclusion;
- the sensitisation the population and all stakeholders to the use and mastery of financial inclusion, especially the culture of savings;
- the creation of e-commerce platforms and online services;
- the education and sensitisation of the population on the positive effects of blockchain technologies;
- the sensitisation of African Central Banks and Governments on the advantages of this blockchain technologies;
- the ease of access to financing for young entrepreneurs;
- exploring the informal sector, which could be a vast source of fund-raising for start-ups;
- the establishment of Internet Exchange Points and their pooling, in order to create a sub-regional ecosystem and reduce the costs of Internet traffic between Member States.
- the creation of a subregional committee in charge of implementing roaming;
- the adoption of common strategies for the reduction of tariffs and implementation of roaming agreements on mobile networks;
- the setting up of a watch observatory in compliance with the Community regulations regarding roaming.
- the implementation of the decision of Telecommunications/ICT Ministers of ECCAS Member States to harmonize and reduce roaming charges; the development and implementation of a regional MOU that regulates the technical, tariff and legal aspects of roaming.

- the establishment of a single area that governs directives, regulations and decisions which are binding on member countries.
- the adoption of Single Market Public Policies;
- harmonization of national ICT regulations and legislation;
- adoption of multisectoral regulation of coexisting areas or sectors;
- the convening of a meeting to relaunch the activities of ARTAC from 06 to 07 August 2018 whose mandate was given to the Republic of Equatorial Guinea;
- the taking into account by the Cameroon TRB of the reminder of ARCEP of Chad to sign the revised Chad-Cameroon coordination agreement;
- the establishment of a subregional working group for the preparation of WRC-19 during the ARCEP meeting in Malabo;
- the establishment of a Subregional Working Group for the implementation of recommendations on cross-border frequency coordination;
- the extension of the Maroua coordination agreement to all other frequencies likely to have a harmful impact;
- the invitation from other Central African countries to follow the example of the Chad-Cameroon coordination agreement
- consideration of the aspect of quality of experience in service quality assessment./-