

## **SERVICE QUALITY DELIVERY AND MARKETING PERFORMANCE OF SUPER MARKETS IN PORT HARCOURT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper empirically examined service quality delivery and marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt. The purpose of this paper is to determine to what extent service quality delivery enhance marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt in order to meet customer needs and wants at profit. The paper adopts the documentary and survey methods. The statistical tool adopted for this paper is the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient with the aid of statistical package for social sciences. The findings of the study show that service quality delivery is strongly related to marketing performance of supermarkets. The paper recommends among others that supermarket operators: to embrace modern marketing concept activities; customer relation/services should be stepped up to measure up to those offered by competitors; and that regular publicity and adverts should be organized to promote the image of supermarkets.*

**Keywords- Service Quality Delivery, Marketing Performance, Supermarkets, Profit Margin, Customer Service**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of service quality delivery for supermarket retailers cannot be disputed. In the highly competitive and dynamic supermarkets' sector, organizations endeavor to use strategic resources to gain market shares. One way of differentiating one store from another is the unique service quality delivery offered to clientele. Consumers use service quality delivery as an evaluative criterion in the decision-making process concerning supermarket selection.

By service quality delivery we mean the way the store is defined in the shopper mind, partly by the functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes. These aspects of the predictor variable will in turn respectively account for the following competencies.

(a) Merchandise carried in store (b) customer service.

By marketing performance, we mean the level of achievements by the supermarkets. This could be measured according to previous researchers in terms of sales volume, profit margin and market share.. These constructs for the study are not subjectively' designed by the present researcher but adopted from models presented by previous researchers like Martineau (1958), Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2008) and Lennon and Burn (2009). This previous researcher used these constructs for the studies in their different environments but the present researcher is using them to study the south east zone situation in Nigeria so as to add to the existing knowledge in the field under study. It has already been pointed out that service quality, delivery is complex in nature. This could be one of the reasons as many definitions of service quality delivery as scholarly publications can be cited. Early scholars, such as Martineau (1958), described service quality delivery as a store's personality and the way in which the store is defined by the shoppers mind, partly by its functional qualities and psychological attributes. According to Lindquist (1974-1975) service quality delivery constitutes a combination of tangible and intangible (psychological) factors that consumers perceive to be present in retail stores. The success of a profit making organization is not only assessed by financial measure but is also governed by its operational effectiveness, which is usually a strong determinant in the organizations quest for excellence and survival in highly competitive markets.

The marketing performance of supermarkets determines how it is producing goods and services in the most effective and efficient manner and the extent to which those goods and services satisfy the

needs and expectations of customers. In the research that has been conducted, the operational performance of five supermarkets which represent five different chains in Mauritius has been assessed. The study examined the performance dimensions of five supermarkets. For the purpose of this study, one performance dimension will be taking into consideration namely: Profit Margin. However, the previous researchers did not explore the relationship between service quality delivery and marketing performance. Few studies have been carried out in Nigeria to ascertain the extent to which service quality delivery affect marketing performance of supermarkets.

Given this knowledge gap, our point of departure from previous studies is to empirically establish the relationship between service quality delivery and marketing performance of supermarkets in the south east zone of Nigeria.

### **Research Problem**

Lack of satisfactory services, capacity-underutilization, poor performance, customer dissatisfaction are some of the characteristics of supermarket forms in Port Harcourt. Why supermarkets are unable to identify good store name, or powerful visual trademark, unmistakable store front? Flow inviting entrance, and compelling store look and hook is promoting patronage of supermarket in the Port Harcourt. The problem may be poor profit margin, low sales volume and unsatisfactory market share and this result in poor marketing performance of the supermarkets in the Port Harcourt.

The supermarket firms are faced with the challenges of maintaining market share and profits while attempting new concepts and store formats in an effort to differentiate themselves from other types of retailers. Major demographic and consumer lifestyle changes have affected not only how consumers shop, but also where they choose to shop and eat their meals. Traditional supermarkets have seen a decline in how much shoppers spend and how frequently they shop in a particular store. While some supermarket operators continue to attempt to cut costs so they can offer reduced everyday prices.

There has been much consolidation in the supermarket industry in recent years. The surviving players have realized that they cannot be all things to all people. Instead, they are attempting to do the things they do best better than their competitors. Nearly every survey consistently indicates what today's customers are looking for in their shopping experience:

Sell what they need and have it in stock when they want it.

Make it easy for them to shop and find what they are looking for.

Provide all the information they need in order to quickly decide what to buy.

Have friendly helpful people available to make the shopping experience a pleasant one.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

It has already been pointed out that service quality delivery is complex in nature. This could be one of the reasons why as many definitions of service quality delivery as scholarly publications can be cited. Early scholars, such as Martineau (1958) described service quality delivery as a stores personality and the way in which the store is defined by the shoppers mind, partly by it functional qualities and psychological attributes. According to Lindquist (1974-1975) service quality delivery constitutes a combination of tangible and intangible (psychological) factors that consumers perceive to be present in retail stores. The success of a profit making organization is not only assessed by financial measure but is also governed by it operational effectiveness, which is usually a strong determinant in the organizations quest for excellence and survival in highly competitive markets

According to Kumar and Suresh (2009), while assessing the potential within an industry, an overall organizational strategy must be developed, including some basic choices of the primary basis for competing. As such, they argued that marketing performance priorities are established among the following four characteristics of quality (product performance), cost efficiency (low cost price), dependability (reliable, timely delivery of orders to customers), and flexibility (responding rapidly with new products or changes in volume). (Kumar et ah, 2009). A study carried out by Sparks (2010) explains how reorientating the operations strategy of a supermarket such as Asda in the UK led the

firm from doom to success. Among the operation priorities were the need to be customer focused, to be a price leader and to increase store productivity. In order to remain competitive, Martineli (2003) elaborated on the following operations strategy as adopted by UK food retailers. This included understanding and meeting customers' needs and behaviors, exercising massive control on supply chain and undertaking new store development programs. On the other hand, Alexander and Akehurst (2000) explained how the use of financial products is a strategy that can enhance customer loyalty. By providing financial services, retailers secure themselves a competitive advantage towards direct competitors: they aim to build stronger and longer customer relationships, derived from customer confidence in the retail store brand.

### **Study Variables and Conceptual Model**

The study variables are drawn from the formulated research problem. These are

- (1) service quality delivery - predictor variable
- (2) marketing performance - criterion variable
- (3) contextual factors - moderating variable

The conceptual framework below shows the relationship among these variables and their dimensions.

### **Hypotheses**

Base on the research framework, the following hypotheses are formulated and tested for this paper.  
H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between merchandise carried in store and profit margin of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between customer service and profit margin of supermarkets in Port Harcourt

H<sub>03</sub>: Firm's level characteristics in the form of size do not significantly affect the influence of store image on marketing performance.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

In the services marketing literature, the service quality construct is a controversial topic (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Zeithaml, 2000; Zins, 2001; Rust and Oliver, 1994; Lapierre et al, 1996). In the business-to-consumer literature, researchers have adopted three broad conceptualisations.

The first, proposed by Gro'nroos (1982, 1984), defined the dimensions of service quality in global terms as being functional and technical. The second, proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), identified service-quality dimensions using terms that describe service-encounter characteristics (reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurances, and tangibles). The third, proposed by Rust and Oliver (1994), considered overall perception of service quality to be based on the customer's evaluation of three dimensions of service encounters: the customer-employee interaction, the service environment, and the service outcome. It is not clear, however, which of these conceptualisations and dimensional patterns are the most appropriate to use (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Rust and Oliver, 1994).

### **Loyalty**

The importance of loyalty has been widely recognised in the marketing literature (Oliver, 1999; Samuelson and Sandvik, 1997; Howard and Sheth, 1969). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) have studied the impact on profits of having a loyal customer base, and Aaker (1991) has discussed the role of loyalty in the brand-equity process, observing that brand loyalty reduces marketing costs and that the relative costs of customer retention are substantially less than those of acquisition (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1987). Another important element of brand loyalty is the intended support of the product or service expressed in communication experiences - with positive word of mouth among loyal consumers leading to greater resistance to competitive strategies (Arndt, 1967; Oliver, 1999; Dick and Basu, 1994). Despite the clear managerial relevance of brand loyalty, conceptual and empirical

gaps remain (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Lau and Lee, 1999; Oliver, 1999; Fournier and Yao, 1997). Specifically, the concept of loyalty in a B2B context is not clearly defined and there are numerous ways of defining and measuring this matter on a consumer market basis. Oliver (1999, p. 34) defined brand loyalty as follows: ... a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive samebrand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior. This definition emphasises the two principal aspects of brand loyalty that have been studied in previous studies: behavioural and attitudinal (Aaker, 1991; Assael, 1998; Day, 1969; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Jacoby and Kynchr, 1973; Oliver, 1999; Tucker, 1964). Behavioural loyalty refers to repeated purchases of the brand, whereas attitudinal brand loyalty includes a degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some distinctive value associated with the brand. The attitude behind the purchase is important because it drives behaviour. Although brand-loyal behaviour is partly determined by situational factors (such as availability), attitudes are more enduring. Jacoby and Kyner (1973) proposed a definition of loyalty that includes six necessary conditions - that brand loyalty is the biased (that is, nonrandom), behavioural (that is, purchase) response, expressed over time, by some decision making unit (a person or group of persons), with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of psychological processes (decision-making, evaluative). Bloemer and Kasper (1995) studied the differences between "true" loyalty and "spurious" loyalty (the latter being due to an inertia effect). These authors found that true loyalty implies (in addition to repetitive purchasing) a true commitment to the brand. Oliver (1997, 1999) also evoked this notion of commitment in his research on satisfaction and brand-loyalty relationship. Numerous studies have established a relationship between service quality and loyalty. Some have posited an indirect influence (Andreasscn and Lindestad, 1998; Ostrowski et al., 1993; Patterson and Spreng, 1997; Pritchard and Howard, 1997), whereas others have posited a direct influence (Boulding et ah, 1993; De Ruyter et ah, 1998). Recent research has indicated a positive and significant relationship between a customer's perception of service quality and that customer's loyalty (expressed as willingness to recommend the company and intentions to repurchase) (Parasuraman et ah, 1988; Zeithaml et ah, 1996; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Danaher and Rust, 1996a, b; Bitner, 1990; Patterson, 1995). These scholars have suggested that the service perceptions of members of the buying centre directly influence loyalty levels of the buying centre towards the supplier firm. The following second hypothesis is therefore postulated:

H2. In a business-to business context, quality perceptions have a positive influence on loyalty levels.

### **Satisfaction**

The role of satisfaction in predicting behavioural intentions is well established (Anderson et al., 1994; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Zeithaml et ah, 1996). The majority of studies assume transactional customer relationships - with previous experiences as primary determinants of repeated purchasing behaviour. Recent research findings offer robust evidence of this, showing the positive relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Oliver, 1999; Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). Similarly, Anderson and Sullivan (1993) found that stated repurchase intentions are strongly related to stated satisfaction across product categories. Given the characteristics of the B2B environment, the present authors expected this relationship to be even stronger in this environment. Researchers in the professional services area have suggested that customers of business services tend to remain with the same provider if continually satisfied (Davidow and Uttal, 1989; Woodside et al., 1992). Accordingly, the third hypothesis of the present study is postulated as follows: H3. In a business-to business context, industrial satisfaction has a positive influence on loyalty levels.

### **Customer Services**

**Customer service** is the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase. According to Turban et al. (2002), "Customer service is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction - that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer

expectation."

Its importance varies by products, industry and customer; defective or broken merchandise can be exchanged, often only with a receipt and within a specified time frame. Retail stores often have a desk or counter devoted to dealing with returns, exchanges and complaints, or will perform related functions at the point of sale; the perceived success of such interactions being dependent on employees "who can adjust themselves to the personality of the guest," according to Micah Solomon quoted in Inc Magazine. A customer service experience can change the entire perception a customer has of the organization.

### **Marketing Performance**

On the side of marketing performance, Leonidou et al (2001) described it as the output of firm involved with the business of buying and selling transaction. Marketing performance according to Nkamnebc (2004), could be measured in terms of sales volume, profit, and market share. In this present study, marketing performance is therefore measured in terms profit margin of the supermarket sector. In a study of performance measures in literature, Sousa (2004: 29) stated that the area of marketing performance is attracting both academic and managerial attention at an increasing pace.

The success of a profit making organization is not only assessed by financial measure but is also governed by its operational effectiveness, which is usually a strong determinant in the-organization quest for excellence and survival in highly competitive markets. Marketing performance of supermarkets determines how far it is selling goods and services in the most effective and efficient manner and the extent to which the goods and services satisfy the needs and expectations of customers (Lomendra 2008).

The retailing industry's business has been around for centuries in the world. Research has shown that the advent of globalization, mechanization, modernization and technology advancements have had and are still having a great impact on the retailing industry. Nowadays, supermarkets play an important role in serving the local community. They are the places where majority of people would shop for food items and grocery. In this competitive and turbulent business environment, it becomes primordial for supermarket operators to sustain business developments and foster customer trust by upholding good practices in their operations (Kumar et ah, 2009).

### **Indicators of Marketing Performance**

The indicator of marketing performance in this study is profit.

### **Profit**

Profit is the different between investments and returns of a venture. It is the total realizable gains after the deduction of initial capital outlay and taxes. Retailers can measure their profit by using two basic methods, markup and margin, both of which give a description of the gross profit. The markup expresses profit as a percentage of the retailer's cost for the product. The margin expresses profit as a percentage of the retailer's sales price for the product. These two methods give different percentages as results, but both percentages are valid descriptions of the retailer's profit. It is important to specify which method they are using when they refer to a retailer's profit as a percentage. Some retailers use margins because you can easily calculate profits from a sales total. If their margin is 30%, then 30% of their sales total is profit. If their markup is 30%, the percentage of their daily sales that are profit will not be the same percentage.

### **Firm's Size as a Moderating Variable**

At the most basic level, firm-level strategy seeks to develop positional advantages based on differentiation or cost advantages. Recognizing that these strategic choices likely influence price promotion strategy, we consider three characteristics that are directly linked to firm-level strategy: retailer differentiation and two sources of cost advantage—average store size and number of stores

in the chain.

### **Size of the Firm**

The expected relationship between price promotion strategies and number of stores and average store size is based on cost advantages associated with operational scale and scope. A retailer's scale can be considered within the context of the number of stores managed by the retail firm; that is, holding store size constant, increasing the number of stores increases operational scale. The size of a physical store largely determines the number of product categories and/or items that can be offered; thus, as store size increases, operational scope increases. (Thomas *et al.*, 1995).

### **Service Quality Delivery and Marketing Performance**

Service quality delivery acts as a criterion in the choice process. Sheth (2006), presented a conceptual model of shopping preference. In this model, image was proposed as a prior determinant in the choice process and as a basis for the evaluation of an entity. Monroe and Guiltinan (2007), investigated casual influence in store choice by comparing three time periods of data. The casual structure guiding store choice is: general opinions/ activities and store perceptions precede specific planning and budgeting, which precede the importance of the information attributes, for instance, advertisements. In order to predict store choice behaviour, Malhotra (2008), proposed a patronage model that described the preference of the value of a store formed by important attributes and preferences of a store. The researcher identified five service quality delivery s: variety and selection, personnel and service, acceptable price, convenient location, and physical facilities. Then he clustered consumers by level of importance of each attribute. The model revealed that each cluster had different preferences and the entire cluster considered the importance of merchandise selection, price and location. As related to a study of store loyalty, Lessig (2006), examined the relationship between service quality delivery and store loyalty in order to predict store loyalty using service quality .delivery attributes. The importance of the influence which service quality delivery has upon marketing performance was indicated. The nature and strength of the relationship between image and loyalty was that knowledge of the service quality delivery provides a significant input into the simultaneous prediction of loyalties to the alternative retail stores. Reynolds, et al (2005), developed service quality delivery for the store loyal customers based on customer lifestyle and emphasized that the convenience of local shopping was important to the time-conscious shopper.

### **Customer Service and Marketing Performance**

**Customer service** is the provision of service to customers before, during and after a purchase. According to Turban ct al. (2002), "Customer service is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction - that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer expectation." Its importance varies by products, industry and customer; defective or broken merchandise can be exchanged, often only with a receipt and within a specified time frame. Retail stores often have a desk or counter devoted to dealing with returns, exchanges and complaints, or will perform related functions at the point of sale; the perceived success of such interactions being dependent on employees "who can adjust themselves to the personality of the guest," according to Micah Solomon quoted in Inc Magazine. From the point of view of an overall sales process engineering effort, customer service plays an important role in an organization's ability to generate income and revenue. From that perspective, customer service should be included as part of an overall approach to systematic improvement. A customer service experience can change the entire perception a customer has of the organization. Some have argued-that the quality and level of customer service has decreased in recent years, and that this can be attributed to a lack of support or understanding at the executive and middle management levels of a corporation and/or a customer service policy. To address this argument, many organizations have employed a variety of methods to improve their customer satisfaction levels.

Customer support is a range of customer services to assist customers in making cost effective and

correct use of a product. It includes assistance in planning, installation, training, trouble shooting, maintenance, upgrading, and disposal of a product.

One of the most important aspects of a customer service is that of what is often referred to as the "Feel Good Factor." Basically the goal is to not only help the customer have a good experience, but to offer them an experience that exceeds their expectations. Several key points are listed as follows

1. Know your product - Know what products/service you are offering back [to front. In other words be an information expert. It is okay to say "I don't know," but it should always be followed up by "but let me find out" or possibly "but my friend knows!" Whatever the situation may be, make sure that you don't leave your customer with an unanswered question.
2. Body Language/Communication - Most of the communication that we relay to others is done through body language. If we have a negative, body language when we interact with others it can show our lack of care. Two of the most important parts of positive body language are smiling and eye contact. Make sure to look your customers in the eye. It shows that we are listening to them, not at them. And then of course smiling is just more inviting than someone who has a blank look on their face.
3. Anticipate Guest Needs - Nothing surprises your customer more than an employee going the extra mile to help them. Always look for ways to serve your customer more than they expect. In doing so it helps them to know that you care and it will leave them with the "Feel Good Factor" that we are searching for.

### Research Methodology

This research study is a descriptive research study, this is informed by the type of phenomenon under study and also because the variable under study were not under the control of the researchers. Therefore the quasi experimental design became the most appropriate in achieving the objectives of this research study. The researchers adopted cross sectional study on the basis that the research involved selecting samples of element from the population of interest measurable at a particular point in time.

### Sample Size Determination Technique

Information from the ministry of commerce and industry revealed the following as the number of registered supermarkets in the Port Harcourt;

**Table 1: List of Registered Supermarkets in the Port Harcourt.**

State	No. of Registered Supermarkets
Oluobasanjo	1003
Rumuola	971
Rumkpoku	286
Rumukwrushi	614
Aba Road	521
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,395</b>

**Sources:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry (South-South Region of Nigeria) 2013.

Consequently, this total number of three thousand, three hundred and ninety five (3,395) were the accessible population of the study. The Taro- Yamcn's sample size determination formula shall be used to determine the sample size to be used for this study, as it is in (Baridam, 2008),

The researchers believes that there is a 95 percent (0,05 significant level) chance that the sample is distributed in the same way as the population. The Taro Yamen’s formula is statistically stated as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n =: Sample Size Sought N = Population Size

e = Level of Significance

Applying the above formula, we have

$$\begin{aligned} N &= 3,395 \\ E &= 0.05 \\ \text{Thus, } n &= \frac{3,395}{1 + 3,395(0.05)^2} \\ &= \frac{3,395}{1 + 8.49} \\ &= \frac{3,395}{9.49} \\ n &= 358 \end{aligned}$$

This meant that three hundred and fifty eight (358) copies of the questionnaire was distributed to respondents in the Port Harcourt of Nigeria. The spearman Rank Order correlation Coefficient statistical tool was adopted for data analysis, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

**Hypothesis One: 1101:** There is no significant relationship between merchandise carried in store and the profit margin of supermarkets in the Port Harcourt.

Model	Summary
R2	0.499
Adjusted r <sup>2</sup>	0.426
F-statistic	0.159
Prob. of F-statistic	0.016

**Source:** Survey Data, 2021.

Decision rule table for hypothesis one

### Decision Rule

The result of the correlation test above reveals that a significant relationship exists between merchandise carried in store and the profit margin of supermarkets, this is evident in the correlation value of 0.499 (50%) and a significant F-statistic probability value of 0.016, which is less than 5% level of significance. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis one and accept the alternative hypothesis one. Thus, there is a significant relationship between merchandise carried in store and the profit margin of supermarkets.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between customer service and profit margin of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.

Decision Rule Table for Hypothesis Two

Model	Summary
R2	0.442
Adjusted r <sup>2</sup>	0.213
F-statistic	1.421
Prob. of F-statistic	0.023

**Source:** Survey data, 2021.

### Decision Rule

The correlation test result reveals that a significant relationship exist between customer service and profit margin of supermarkets, this is evident in the correlation value of 0.442 (44%) and a significant F-statistic probability value of 0.023 which was less than 5% level of significance. We therefore reject null hypothesis five and accept the alternative hypothesis five. Thus, there is a significant relationship between customer service and profit margin of supermarkets.

**Hypothesis Three:** Firm's level characteristics in the form of size do not significantly affect the influence of service quality delivery on marketing performance in Port Harcourt

Decision rule table for hypothesis three

Model 1	Summary
R2	0.332
Adjusted r <sup>2</sup>	0.281
F-statistic	0.058
Prob. of F-statistic	0.041

**Source:** Survey data, 2021.

### Decision Rule

The correlation test result above reveals that a significant relationship exists between firm's level characteristics in the form of size and service quality delivery on marketing performance. This stand is evident in the correlation value of 0.332 (33%) and a significant F-statistic probability value of 0.041, which was less than 5% level of significance. We therefore reject the null hypothesis three and accept the alternative hypothesis seven. Thus, firm's level characteristics in form of size will significantly affect the influence of service quality delivery on marketing performance of supermarket.

### CONCLUSION

Consequent on the discussions above, the following conclusions were made by the researcher;

- i. The merchandise carried in store has significant influence on the profit margin of supermarkets in Port Harcourt
- ii. Customer service has significant influence on the profit margin of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.
- iii. Firm's level characteristics in form of size, significantly affects the influence of service quality delivery on marketing performance of supermarkets in Port Harcourt.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above conclusions, the following recommendations were considered relevant;

1. The modern marketing concept which sees the customer as the center of every marketing activity should be seriously embraced by the authorities of the supermarkets in Port Harcourt.
2. Supermarkets, for efficient and effective sales performance, should ensure that they carry vast stocks and varieties of regular consumer goods and items.

3. Customer relations/services of the supermarkets should be stepped up to measure up to those offered by competitors so as to help retain existing customers, while at the same time, attracting prospecting consumers.
4. Supermarkets should indulge in periodic appraisal of their general marketing performance since this could serve as a medium of measuring the progress made over time.
5. Regular publicities and adverts should be organized to promote and boost the image of supermarkets since such may serve as a means of increasing the volume of sales of the supermarkets.

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