

THE INFLUENCE OF CONSUMERS' TIE STRENGTH, HOMOPHILY AND SOURCE CREDIBILITY TOWARD ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH (EWOM) BEHAVIOR

by:
Winda Lely Oroh¹

¹Faculty of Economics and Business
International Business Administration (IBA) Program
University of Sam Ratulangi Manado
email: ¹winda_oroh@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the form of online product reviews can influence the sales of a product and/or service, and that informational-based determinants are very important to consumers when evaluating reviews. The purpose of this research is to analyze the influence of consumers' tie strength, homophily, and source credibility toward electronic word-of-mouth behavior (eWOM). This research used quantitative analyze. The method used to analyze the data is the Multiple Regression Analysis. The population observed is the consumer who ever buy outfit product through online services and give publication via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) located in Manado, North Sulawesi with sample size as many as 100 respondents. The result from this research is tie strength and source credibility influences the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior both simultaneously and partially. While homophily has no significant influence to the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior partially. This research suggests that tie strength is the dominant influence variable toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior. It means that the consumers of outfit product in Manado considered closeness is the important factor that influenced consumer to exchange information online.

Keywords: *tie-strength, homophily, source credibility*

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

There is no denial that this world today is offered with facility and simplicity. The world changed along with the development of technology that is still advancing to serve the social needs and human activities. The rapid development of technology covers every sector of human activities and brought a lot of benefits for people. From the small inventions to big inventions, the technology made the people more dependent to the technology. As well as foods, apparels and place, today the technology starting to move to become a primary needs of the people.

The impact of technological development can be felt in the social sector the most. With so many inventions today to help the people interact between each other, the people can be connected even one across the world. One of the greatest inventions that the people felt today are the internet. In the globalization era, the internet helps the interaction of the people. The internet connects the people globally using the media of computer. With internet the people are provided with information and access to data trade, brought easiness in the people activities. The rapid development of the internet followed by the network that become wider, the internet seen as a primary needs or daily needs especially for urban communities that in their activities are demanded to be more accessible and easier to reach. With so much benefits, the internet effects also spreading to the other sectors. For example is in business sector.

One of many benefits of internet in business sector is the internet enables the people as consumer to share and exchange their information, opinions, and experiences about products and services. The advent of the Internet has extended consumers' options for gathering unbiased product information from other consumers and provides the opportunity for consumers to offer their own consumption-related advice by engaging in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Internet development in Indonesia has shown significant development. It is now common for companies in Indonesia to utilize e-commerce. Consumers who are used to make conventional purchase are turning to e-commerce purchases. In the dynamic of e-commerce, we see consumers are always looking for more references and trust the opinions within the community about a product or often referred to as word-of-mouth (WOM). There was no denying the power of word-of-mouth plays a major role in its influence on consumer purchasing decisions. With the progress of internet network which gives choices of information regarding a product allowing a form of word-of-mouth communication that not only become a person-to-person form of communication about a product or service, but also capable to turn into many forms of word-of-mouth communication that spread globally.

In North Sulawesi especially in Manado, the internet develops rapidly. It proved in the Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS) survey in 2013, the use of the internet to receiving and sending email, searching information about products and services, and interacts in social media, reaches 100% in North Sulawesi. That proves that North Sulawesi is the fastest province to respond the internet development. Since the people in North Sulawesi especially in Manado are consumptive and the trend of online shops make internet became one of primary needs. The condition of the internet development can be related with the consumptive behavior of people in Manado. The ease that internet offered makes people even more consumptive.

Research Objectives

There are specific objectives for this research, which is to identify:

1. The influence of consumers' tie-strength, homophily, and source credibility toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.
2. The influence of consumers' tie strength toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.
3. The influence of consumers' homophily toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.
4. The influence of source credibility toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories

Marketing

Kotler and Keller (2012:27) stated that marketing is about identifying and meeting human and social needs. Still the same author, one of the shortest good definitions of marketing is meeting needs profitably. While American Marketing Association (2013) defined marketing as the activity, set of institutions, and process for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. This means marketing focuses on making the product available at the right place, at the right time, and at a price that is acceptable to customers.

Consumer Behavior

Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2009:6) defined consumer behavior as the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas, to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society. Consumer behavior is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires (Salomon, 2013:31).

Word-of-Mouth

Arndt (1967) defined Word-of-Mouth (WOM) as an oral form of interpersonal non-commercial communication among acquaintances. Word-of-mouth (WOM) is a consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market. It is therefore perceived to be more reliable, credible, and trustworthy by consumers compared to firm-initiated communications. Blackwell et al. (2001) described word-of-mouth (WOM) as the informal transmission of ideas, comments, opinions, and information between two or more individuals, neither one of which is a marketer.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Thurau et al. (2004) defined electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet. Litvin et al. (2008) defined electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) as all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers.

Tie Strength

Tie strength refers to the potency of the bond between members of a network (Mittal et al., 2008). Otherwise, Graham et al. (1998) stated tie strength is a multidimensional construct that represent the strength of the dyadic interpersonal relationship in the context of social networks.

Homophily

McPherson et al. (2001) divided homophily into two groups, namely homophily status and homophily value. Homophily status refers to the intrinsic characteristic such as ethnicity, age, and sex as well as acquired characteristic such as religion, education, and employment. While homophily value refers to personal internal state such as personality, expectations, and attitudes. The similarity of individuals predisposes them toward a greater level of interpersonal attraction, trust, and understanding than would be expected among dissimilar individuals (Carter et al., 2003).

Source Credibility

Zhang (2008) defined source credibility as message source's perceived ability (expertise) or motivation to provide accurate and truthful information (trustworthiness). While Buda and Zhang (2008) in Cheung and Thadani (2010) defined source credibility as a theory that identifies source expertise and source bias as elements that affect the credibility of an information source.

Previous Research

Chu and Kim (2011) explored Tie strength, trust, normative, and informational influence are positively associated with users' overall electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior, whereas a negative relationship was found with regard to homophily. Brown et al. (2007) found homophily is almost entirely independent of interpersonal factors and tie strength is less relevant in an online communities. To take credibility, each individual contributes some of their own credibility to the community and in turn their information also gains credibility from association with the community. Cheung and Thadani (2010) identified the key factors that are specific to the context of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Looking from the traditional communication theories, there are four major elements in social communication, including the communicator (sender), the stimulus (message), the receiver, and the response. The survey does provide the individual-level analysis of the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication. The review shows factors associated with stimulus influence consumers as receiver and communicator response the information.

Conceptual Framework

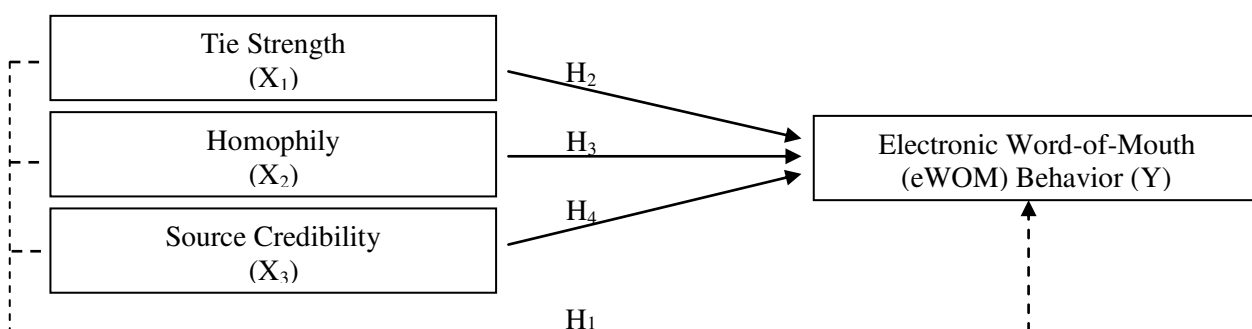


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Theoretical Framework

Research Hypothesis

- H₁ : There is a significant influence of consumers' tie strength, homophily, source credibility toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.
- H₂ : There is a significant influence of consumers' tie strength towards electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.
- H₃ : There is a significant influence of consumers' homophily towards electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.
- H₄ : There is a significant influence of source credibility towards electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.

RESEARCH METHOD

Type of Research

This research is quantitative research method using causal type of research. This type of research determines if one variable causes another variable to occur or change. This research will investigate the influence of consumers' tie strength, homophily, and source credibility toward electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) behavior.

Place and Time of Research

This research was conducted in Manado, North Sulawesi during July to September 2014.

Population and Sample

The population refers to the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate (Sekaran and Bougie, 2009:262). The target population of this research is consumer who ever buy outfit product through online services and give publication via electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) located in Manado, North Sulawesi. Sample is a conclusion can be made from the sample about the population to achieve the research objective (Saunders and Thornhill, 2007). This research is based on Simple Random Sampling technique of Probability Sampling Method. 100 consumers were conducted as the sample in this research.

Data Collection Method

The data used in this research consist of two types between primary data through questionnaires and secondary data taken from books, journals and relevant literature from library and internet to understand of theoretical support on this research.

Operational Definition of Research Variables

The general explanations about variables in this current study are stated as follows:

1. Tie Strength (X₁) is potency of the bond between members of a network. (Mittal et al., 2008)
2. Homophily (X₂) is the similarity of individuals predisposes them toward a greater level of interpersonal attraction, trust, and understanding than would be expected among dissimilar individuals (Carter et al., 2003)
3. Source Credibility (X₃) is message source's perceived ability (expertise) or motivation to provide accurate and truthful information (trustworthiness). (Zhang, 2008)
4. Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Y) is any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet. (Thurau et al., 2004)

Data Analysis Method

Validity and Reliability

Validity is a test of how well an instrument that is developed measures the particular concept it is intended to measure. To analyze the validity of questionnaire, Pearson Product Moment is used. An instrument measure is valid if the instrument measure what ought to be measured. Validity for each variable is good where the values are above minimum level of 0.30. Reliability test is established by testing for both consistency and stability of the answer of questions. Consistency indicates how well the items measuring a concept hang together as a set; Cronbach's alpha is a reliability coefficient that indicates how well the items in a set are positively correlated to one another, the questionnaire is reliable if the value of Cronbach's Alpha more than 0.6 (Sekaran and Bougie, 2009:162).

Multiple Regression Analysis Method

The method of analysis used in this study is multiple regression model. Multiple regression analysis is the process of calculating a coefficient of multiple determination and regression equation using two or more independent variables and one dependent variable (Sekaran and Bougie, 2009:348). The equation model of multiple regression analysis used in this research can be formulated as shown below:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + e$$

Where:

- Y = Electronic word-of-mouth behavior (Dependent Variable)
- α = The constant, when all independent variable equal to 0
- X_1 = Tie Strength (independent variable)
- X_2 = Homophily (independent variable)
- X_3 = Source credibility (independent variable)
- β = The slope for each independent variable
- ϵ = Error

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Validity and Reliability

Validity test is used to know whether the instrument is valid or not. The instrument is valid if the value of variable is positive and more than 0.3 ($r > 0.3$). The result tie strength (X_1) is 0.693, homophily (X_2) is 0.755 and source credibility (X_3) is 0.618. This means that all the indicators are valid. Reliability test is used to check the consistency of the measurement instrument. The reliability test in this research using Alpha Cronbach, which will show the instruments are reliable if the coefficient is more than 0.6. The value of Cronbach Alpha is 0.842 which are more than 0.6. Therefore, the measurement instruments used for this research are reliable.

Classical Assumption

Multicollinearity

Table 1. Multicollinearity result

Model	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
1 Tie Strength	.706	1.417
Homophily	.734	1.362
Source Credibility	.681	1.468

a. Dependent Variable: EWOM

Source: SPSS data analysis, 2014

Table 1 above shows that the Tolerance of tie strength is 0.706; homophily is 0.734, and source credibility is 0.681 meaning the tolerance value of each variable is more than 0.2. The VIF value of tie strength is 1.417, homophily is 1.362, and source credibility is 1.468 meaning the VIF value of each variable is less than 10. Since all the tolerance value is more than 0.2 and VIF value is less than 10 of each variable independent, so this research is free from multicollinearity.

Heteroscedasticity

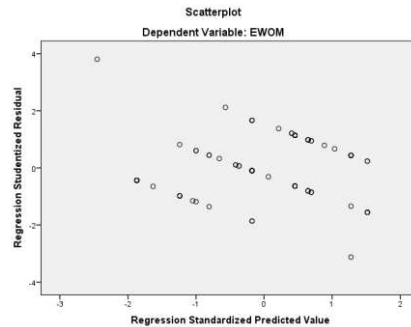


Figure 2. Heteroscedasticity result
Source: SPSS data analysis, 2014

The Figure 2 shows that the pattern of points is spreading. The points are spreading above and below of zero point in ordinate. This is proved that there is no heteroscedasticity in this regression.

Normality

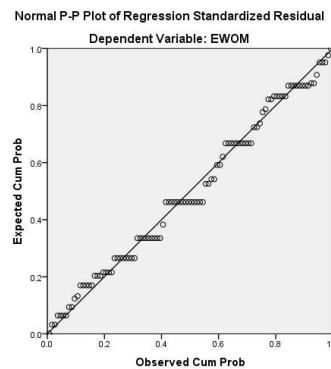


Figure 3. Normality result
Source: SPSS data analysis, 2014

In Figure 3, it shows that the data are spreading near the diagonal line and follow the direction of diagonal line. Therefore, the normality test is completed.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 2. Multiple Regression Result

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.806	.428		1.880	.063
	Tie Strength (X ₁)	.395	.093	.393	4.256	.000
	Homophily (X ₂)	.115	.107	.098	1.080	.283
	Source Credibility (X ₃)	.303	.098	.292	3.102	.003

a. Dependent Variable: EWOM
Source: SPSS data analysis, 2014

The computation was done by using the SPSS software. The computerized calculation ensures the accuracy of the analysis. From the result in the table above, the model defines as:

$$Y = .806 + 0.395X_1 + 0.115X_2 + 0.303X_3$$

From the multiple linear regression equation above, it can inform the interpretation as follows:

- 1) Constant value of .806 means that if the variables in this research of Variable X_1 , X_2 and X_3 simultaneously increased by one scale or one unit will increase the Y at .806 point.
- 2) Coefficient value of 0.395 means that if the variables in this research of X_1 increased by one scale or one unit, it will improve and increase Y at 0.395.
- 3) Coefficient value of 0.115 means that if the variables in this research of X_2 increased by one scale or one unit, it will improve and increase Y at 0.115.
- 4) Coefficient value of 0.303 means that if the variables in this research of X_3 increased by one scale or one unit, it will improve and increase Y at 0.303.

Multiple Regression Coefficient of Correlation & Determination

Table 3. Table R and R²

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.649 ^a	.422	.403	.571

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tie Strength, Homophily, Source Credibility

Source: SPSS data analysis, 2014

The coefficient of correlation (R) measures if there is significant relationship between the three independent variables with dependent variable, the value of R is 0.649 which proved that the relationship among variable independents and dependent is very strong. The coefficient of determination (R²) measures how far the ability of a model in explaining variation of dependent variable. The value of R² is 0.422 shows that the linear relationship in this model is able to explain the civil servants' performance (Y) for 42.2% while the rest 57.8% is explained by other factors not discussed in this research

Hypothesis Testing

F-test

F-test is used to determine the whole effect of all independent variables to dependent variable. This test is done by comparing the F_{count} with F_{table} . If F_{count} is higher than F_{table} , H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

Table 4. F-test

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.780	3	7.593	23.320	.000 ^b
	Residual	31.260	96	.326		
	Total	54.040	99			

a. Predictors: (Constant), X_3 , X_2 , X_1

b. Dependent Variable: Y

Source: SPSS data analysis, 2014

The level of significant of 0.05 and degree of freedom (df) of 3; 100, the F_{table} from F distribution table is $F_{3; 100; 0.05} = 2.70$, while f_{count} is 23.320 then the result is $f_{\text{count}} > f_{\text{table}} : 23.320 > 2.70$. Since the f_{count} is greater than f_{table} , H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. It means that the independent variables significantly affect the dependent variable simultaneously.

T-test

T-test is used to determine the partial effect of each independent variable to dependent variable. T-test value is obtained by comparing value of T_{count} with T_{table} . If T_{count} is higher than T_{table} , then H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

Table 5. T-test

	Model	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.880	.063
	Tie Strength	4.256	.000
	Homophily	1.080	.283
	Source Credibility	3.102	.003

a. Dependent Variable: Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Source: SPSS data processed, 2014.

The partial influence for each independent variable will be explained as follows.

1. Tie Strength (X_1) to Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior (Y)
The hypothesis is reject H_0 and accept H_1 if $T_{\text{count}} > T_{\text{table}}$ or accept H_0 and reject H_1 if $T_{\text{table}} > T_{\text{count}}$. In Table 5 the T_{count} of tie strength (X_1) is 4.256. Comparing T_{count} with T_{table} : $4.256 > 1.984$. Since the T_{count} is greater than T_{table} , H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. Therefore, tie strength has very significant influence to electronic word-of-mouth behavior.
2. Homophily (X_2) to Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior (Y)
The hypothesis is reject H_0 and accept H_1 if $T_{\text{count}} > T_{\text{table}}$ or accept H_0 and reject H_1 if $T_{\text{table}} > T_{\text{count}}$. In Table 5 the T_{count} of homophily (X_2) is 1.080. Comparing T_{count} with T_{table} : $1.080 < 1.984$. Since the T_{count} is lower than T_{table} , H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. Therefore, career promotion has no significant influence to electronic word-of-mouth behavior.
3. Source Credibility (X_3) to Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior (Y)
The hypothesis is reject H_0 and accept H_1 if $T_{\text{count}} > T_{\text{table}}$ or accept H_0 and reject H_1 if $T_{\text{table}} > T_{\text{count}}$. In Table 5 the T_{count} of Source Credibility (X_3) is 3.102. Comparing T_{count} with T_{table} : $3.033 > 1.984$. Since the T_{count} is greater than T_{table} , H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. Therefore, source credibility has very significant influence to electronic word-of-mouth behavior.

Discussion

The research was collected data from 100 respondents that were categorized by gender, age, class and occupation. The result shows that two independent variables which are tie strength and source credibility has positive influence toward electronic word-of-mouth behavior partially. However, the independent variable homophily influenced the electronic word-of-mouth behavior simultaneously but not partially.

Tie Strength towards Electronic Word-of-Mouth Behavior

The researcher found that Tie Strength as the dominant influence compare with the other variables that influence Electronic Word-of-Mouth Behavior in Manado. Closeness is the important factor that influenced consumer to exchange information online. It may be happened because psychologically the consumer seems to trust the information from family and close friends more than a large number of acquaintances in social media. This condition indicates that the consumers will be more supportive to family or close friends' online shop. Analyzing the influence of Tie Strength towards Electronic Word-of-Mouth, the researcher has found the similar result with previous study by Brown et al. (2007) that shown the tie strength seem to activate trustworthiness dimension of source credibility which is mean exchange information activity depends on the personal or emotional relationships. However, Chu and Kim (2011) findings show that tie strength not significantly influence Electronic Word-of-Mouth Behavior. It means the information shared is not limited to strong ties group like family and close friends but also to weak ties group like a large number of acquaintances.

Homophily towards Electronic Word-of-Mouth Behavior

The researcher has found that Homophily has no influence Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior. Since the consumers assumed through social media they can exchange information with all their acquaintances, it is not significantly influence Electronic Word-of-Mouth Behavior. Furthermore, for them, there are no boundaries for someone to share information only with people who has similarity with them. In social media, the exchange information activity allows the people to be connected with all the contact which includes people with different gender, age, lifestyle and interest. The consumers tend to share the information to all their contacts in social media or their family and close friends rather than to share information to the people with similar gender, age, lifestyle, and interest. Consistent with the Chu and Kim (2011) findings showed that, homophily is not significantly influence Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior. One explanation for this could be that when consumers want to exchange information about a product, they tend to share their product experience with all their contacts in social media, which adds up to a great number of acquaintances.

Source Credibility towards Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The researcher found that Source Credibility is one of the factors that influence people to share information. Source Credibility influences Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior, because it provides accurate and truthful information. The information shared in social media based on their good experiences before. Good experiences mean their experiences encounter the online shopping activity is proper with the consumers' expectation like the product condition and quality. Those experiences build the consumers' trust and may trigger the consumers to share information about the product to all their contact in social media. The result of this research is different with Brown et al. (2007) findings that not significantly influence Electronic Word-of-Mouth Behavior. From the findings, Source Credibility is closer to the offline conceptualization rather than online conceptualization but still carries some unique attributes due to the nature of the environment in which Word-of-Mouth social network is created and propagated.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The final conclusions of this research are:

1. Tie strength, homophily, and source credibility have significant influence towards electronic word-of-mouth behavior simultaneously.
2. Tie strength has a significant influence towards electronic word-of-mouth behavior partially.
3. Homophily has no significant influence towards electronic word-of-mouth behavior partially.
4. Source credibility has a significant influence towards electronic word-of-mouth behavior partially.

Recommendation

This research was done with hope that it has a big contribution especially for marketers in Manado who want to use social media to promote their product. The following are recommendations as input that hopefully can be useful as suggestions:

1. The result shows that tie strength has the most significant influence towards consumers' Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior in Manado, North Sulawesi. Therefore, the researcher suggest to paying attention on this factor in order to maximize the promotion. The marketers have to intensively increase the promotion activity to family and friends. By doing so, it will increase the electronic word-of-mouth behavior.
2. Source Credibility also has to be considered intensively in order to increase the effectiveness of Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior. The marketer has to explore an integrated marketing strategy that will increase credible information and perspective within customers. Therefore, when the information is spreading in the market, credibility of the information will support the Electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior then enhance the customer intention of the product.

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