

Social Media Users' Attitudes towards Politics in Malaysia

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Abstract

Examining social media users' political attitudes offers a vital subject for investigation, as news dissemination and political discussion increasingly depend on this platform. Drawing on the existing studies, the researchers strive to clarify the common denominator between social media use and Malaysian political attitudes. The data utilized in this study is derived from a survey questionnaire that was sent to social media users in Malaysia. The questions covered various aspects of political engagement, efficacy and trust: ultimately, they can help determine the respondent's motivations, actions and opinions regarding the area of politics in Malaysia. By explaining this scenario, the results of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of how social media affects political discourse and participation in Malaysia among users and stakeholders regarding politics in Malaysia. The implications of this study are significant for policymakers, political campaigners, and social media platforms, as the findings can inform strategies to enhance political engagement, foster democratic participation, and improve the overall quality of political communication on social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Political Attitudes, Political Engagement, User Perceptions

Introduction

In Malaysia today, social media has become a pivotal space for engaging in political conversations and fostering community ties (Kodish & Pettegrew, 2022; Tangney et al., 2021). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram play a crucial role in sharing news and facilitating lively discussions about politics among Malaysians. Understanding how Malaysians use these platforms to interact with political content is crucial for policymakers, scholars, and professionals who aim to harness these interactions effectively (Hampton et al., 2023; Vaccari et al., 2022).

This research delves into the impact of social media on political attitudes in Malaysia. Building on prior studies (Bail et al., 2020; Hollebeek & Chen, 2021), it explores the motivations that drive Malaysians to engage in political activities on social media. By examining real-life

interactions in Malaysia, the study seeks to reveal the underlying reasons, thoughts, and behaviors that prompt users to discuss and engage with political issues online. The insights gained will inform strategies aimed at boosting civic engagement and fostering deeper democratic participation through social media in Malaysia (Van Doorn et al., 2020; Wolfe et al., 2021).

Literature Review

This section reviews how social media impacts politics in Malaysia. It considers the research of Kodish and Pettegrew (2022), and Tangney et al. (2021), who discuss the significant role of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in transforming political discourse among Malaysians. Other scholars like Bail et al. (2020) and Hollebeek and Chen (2021) highlight the importance of understanding the use of social media for political engagement and its implications for policymaking and civic involvement. This review draws on a variety of studies, both from Malaysia and globally, to demonstrate how social media influences political behaviours in different contexts. It details the motivations for using social media for political purposes and the effects on democratic processes. These insights provide a solid foundation for our study, which aims to delve into the nuances of political engagement on social media platforms among Malaysians.

Overview of Theoretical Background in Social Media Users' Attitudes Towards Politics

Understanding the attitudes of social media users towards politics necessitates a comprehensive theoretical framework that considers individual motivations, social influences, and underlying values. In this study, we draw upon two prominent theoretical perspectives: the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Value Theory.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), suggests that individuals' behavioural intentions are influenced by three key factors: attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Attitudes refer to the individual's positive or negative evaluation of performing the behaviour, subjective norms encompass the perceived social pressure to engage in the behaviour, and perceived behavioural control reflects the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour. Applied to social media users' attitudes towards politics, TPB provides insights into the factors shaping users' intentions to engage in political activities on social media platforms, such as sharing political content, participating in discussions, or following political figures.

In addition to TPB, we integrate the Value Theory, which posits that individuals hold core values that guide their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Values represent enduring beliefs about desirable end states or modes of conduct that transcend specific situations and influence decision-making processes. By examining how values shape social media users' attitudes towards politics, we can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations and priorities driving their engagement with political content on digital platforms.

The intention to engage with political postings on social media is influenced by a multitude of factors, as evidenced by extensive literature. The factors listed in the table represent those extracted from this literature and are aligned with relevant theoretical frameworks, reflecting a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics shaping social media users' attitudes and behaviours towards political content.

Table 1

Factors Related to Social Media Users' Attitudes Towards Politics

Factor	Description	References
Curiosity	Curiosity towards political issues and leaders on social media platforms.	Parmelee & Bichard, 2011; Ceron et al., 2014; Lee & Ma, 2012
Expectancy	Expectations regarding the responsiveness and influence of political leaders on social media.	Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2012; Rheingold, 2008
Sensibility	Perception of transparency and responsiveness of political leaders using social media.	Valenzuela et al., 2009; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Weeks et al., 2017
Socialization	Perceived importance and normativity of engaging with political leaders on social media.	Weeks et al., 2017; Vromen, 2008; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017
Source of Information	Reliance on social media as a source of information about political leaders.	Metzger et al., 2010; Sundar & Nass, 2001; Johnson & Kaye, 2004
Communication Platform	Perception of social pressure and trendiness regarding using social media to communicate with political leaders.	Ajzen, 1991
Availability	Frequency of social media use and engagement with political content.	Tangney et al., 2004; Hampton et al., 2015; Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S., 2012
Self-Efficacy	Confidence in effectively communicating opinions and ideas and influencing public opinion through social media.	Bandura et al., 1999; Caprara et al., 2017; Crawford, 2009
Accessibility	Ease of accessing political leaders' posts on social media.	Chen & Wellman, 2004; Y. Kim et al., 2013
Prosperity	Belief that engagement between people and political leaders on social media leads to societal harmony, freedom, and happiness.	Granovetter, 2005; Bennett, 2012; Warren et al., 2001
Progressive	Perception of political leaders' progressiveness based on their social media engagement.	Holbert et al., 2010; Vaccari et al., 2013; Bennett, 2012
Effectiveness	Perception of social media engagement's effectiveness in facilitating prompt, correct, and satisfactory actions.	J. Kim & Lee, 2011; Park et al., 2009; Kruse et al., 2018
Attitude	Personal feelings and opinions towards political leaders' presence and communication on social media.	Vitak et al., 2011; Serazio, 2017; Bail et al., 2018
Subjective Norms	Influence of friends and family engagement on individual intentions to engage with political leaders on social media.	Kahne et al., 2012; Gil de Zuniga et al., 2017; Jenkins & Ito, 2015

Factor	Description	References
Perceived Behavioral Control	Perceived ability to engage with political leaders on social media, influenced by the presence of other users and perceived safety.	Bandura, A., 1997
Perceived Value	Interest in engaging with political leaders based on the perceived societal benefits of their political values.	Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006
Intention to Engage	Willingness to engage with political leaders' content on social media based on personal support, desire for influence, and participation in discussions.	Weeks et al., 2017; Lenz, 2013; Crawford, 2009

These factors, derived from the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Value Theory, provide a theoretical foundation for understanding social media users' attitudes towards politics. By examining how attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and core values intersect with political engagement on social media, this study aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms driving users' behaviours and preferences in the Malaysian context.

Research Methodology

This paper outlines a research methodology comprising four main steps: identification of factors influencing social media users' engagement with political content, questionnaire design incorporating validated measures, rigorous data analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics, and discussion of the findings to offer insights into the dynamics of political engagement on social media.

Questionnaire Design

The research methodology employed in this study involved designing a questionnaire based on theoretical constructs from the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Value Theory. The aim was to develop a model of user engagement with politics on social media. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: one gathering demographic information and the other exploring political views, issues, and experiences. A Likert Scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," was used for respondents to indicate their agreement with statements. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of social media users' attitudes and behaviours towards politics, essential for constructing the intended model of engagement.

Table 2

The Survey Questionnaire Items Adapted from Existing Literature

Factor	Item	References
Curiosity	C_1 I follow political leaders on social media because I am curious about political issues.	Parmelee & Bichard (2011)
	C_2 I will always check what political leaders are posting on social media.	Ceron et al. (2014)

Factor	Item	References
	C_3 I regularly obtain information about political leaders on social media.	Lee & Ma (2012)
Expectancy	E_1 I think the political leader will respond to my involvement in social media.	Valeriani & Vaccari (2016)
	E_2 I believe that my involvement in social media can influence the decisions of political leaders.	Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2012)
	E_3 I'm confident in my ability to make engagements with political leaders on social media.	Rheingold (2008)
Sensibility	S_1 I feel that political leaders who engage with social media users are more responsive to people's concerns.	Valenzuela et al. (2009)
	S_2 I believe that political leaders who use social media are more transparent about their policies and decisions.	Gil de Zuniga et al. (2012)
	S_3 I'm more likely to engage with political leaders who use social media to communicate with the people.	Weeks et al. (2017)
Socialization	SZ_1 I believe that it is important for political leaders to be active on social media.	Weeks et al. (2017)
	SZ_2 I feel that engaging with political leaders on social media is common and is a part of being a citizen in today's society.	Vromen (2008)
	SZ_3 I feel that engaging with political leaders on social media is a way to stay informed and up-to-date on political issues.	Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2017)
Source of Information	SI_1 I am looking for information about political leaders from sources on social media.	Metzger et al. (2010)
	SI_2 I feel that social media is a source of information about political leaders.	Sundar & Nass (2001)
	SI_3 I trust the source of information on social media about political leaders.	Johnson & Kaye (2004)
Communication Platform	CP_1 I felt that there was pressure for me to use social media to communicate with political leaders.	Ajzen (1991)
	CP_2 I think using social media as a communication platform with political leaders is a trend these days.	Ajzen (1991)

Factor	Item	References
	CP_3 I believe users feel it is necessary to use social media to communicate with political leaders.	Ajzen (1991)
Availability	A_1 I have the ability to limit the amount of time spent on social media.	Tangney et al. (2004)
	A_2 I regularly check social media accounts throughout the day.	Hampton et al. (2015)
	A_3 I actively engage with the posts of political leaders on social media by commenting, liking, or sharing them.	Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012)
Self-Efficacy	SE_1 I feel confident in my ability to effectively communicate my opinions and ideas on social media.	Bandura et al. (1999)
	SE_2 I believe I can make a difference in shaping public opinion through my involvement with political leaders' posts on social media.	Caprara et al. (2017)
	SE_3 I am adept at using social media to engage in political discussions and debates.	Crawford (2009)
Accessibility	AB_1 I find it easy to find the posts of political leaders on social media.	Chen & Wellman (2004)
	AB_2 I frequently come across social media posts made by political leaders while scrolling through their feeds.	Y. Kim et al. (2013)
	AB_3 I receive alerts when political leaders post on social media, which makes their posts easily accessible to me.	Y. Kim et al. (2013)
Prosperity	P_1 I think harmony will exist if there is engagement between the people and political leaders on social media.	Granovetter (2005)
	P_2 I think freedom will exist if there is involvement between the people and political leaders on social media.	Bennett (2012)
	P_3 I think happiness will be created if there is involvement between the people and political leaders on social media.	Warren et al. (2001)

Factor	Item	References
Progressive	PG_1 I, a progressive social media user, tend to see political leaders who regularly post on social media as more progressive than those who don't use social media to communicate with people.	Holbert et al. (2010)
	PG_2 I am more likely to engage with political leaders on social media if they share posts related to progressive issues or values.	Vaccari et al. (2013)
	PG_3 When political leaders share posts related to progressive issues or values on social media, it increases my willingness to engage with them and support their political efforts.	Bennett (2012)
Effectiveness	EF_1 I think the speed of action will be better if there is engagement between the people and political leaders on social media.	J. Kim & Lee (2011)
	EF_2 I think the right action will be taken by all if there is engagement between the people and political leaders on social media.	Park et al. (2009)
	EF_3 I think service satisfaction will be achieved if there is engagement between the people and political leaders on social media.	Kruse et al. (2018)
Attitude	AT_1 I feel curious about the opinions and statements of political leaders that they post on social media.	Vitak et al. (2011)
	AT_2 I feel more connected to political leaders when they share personal stories and experiences on social media.	Serazio (2017)
	AT_3 I feel that the courtesy and attitude of political leaders on social media affect the willingness of the conservatives to engage with them.	Bail et al. (2018)
Subjective Norms	SN_1 I think the frequency to which my friends and family members engage with political leaders' posts on social media will affect my own intention to engage with them.	Kahne et al. (2012)
	SN_2 I believe social media is a medium for gathering information about political leaders.	Gil de Zuniga et al. (2017)
	SN_3 I'm comfortable using different communication platforms to engage with political leaders and it affects my readiness.	Jenkins & Ito (2015)

Factor	Item	References
Perceived Behavioral Control	PBC_1 I feel comfortable engaging with political leaders based on the presence of other users on social media.	Bandura, A. (1997)
	PBC_2 I think it is safe to get information about political leaders in social media.	Bandura, A. (1997)
	PBC_3 I feel that I have control over the amount of time and effort I spend engaging with political leaders on social media.	Bandura, A. (1997)
Perceived Value	PV_1 I will be more likely to engage with political leaders on social media when their political values bring peace to society.	Bagozzi & Dholakia (2006)
	PV_2 I feel more interested in engaging with political leaders on social media when their political values bring prosperity to society.	Bagozzi & Dholakia (2006)
	PV_3 I feel more interested in engaging with political leaders on social media when their political values improve the quality of service to the community.	Bagozzi & Dholakia (2006)
Intention to engage	IT_1 If a political leader I support posts on social media, I am more likely to engage with their content.	Weeks et al. (2017)
	IT_2 I tend to engage with politics on social media to make sure my views are heard.	Lenz (2013)
	IT_3 I tend to engage in political discussion on social media with others.	Crawford (2009)

Survey Administration

The survey was conducted using the online platform Google Forms, which is distributed through popular social media applications such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and through face-to-face interactions using QR codes. This distribution strategy was implemented from November 8th, 2023, to December 28th, 2023, aiming to ensure broad participation from diverse segments of social media users in Malaysia.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the survey, the collected data underwent rigorous analysis to explore the relationships between identified constructs and social media users' attitudes toward politics in Malaysia. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, summarized demographic characteristics and survey responses. Factor analysis assessed construct validity and identified underlying factors explaining response variance. Reliability analysis, utilizing Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, evaluated internal consistency of survey items. Regression analysis investigated predictive power of Theory of Planned Behaviour constructs and core values on attitudes toward political engagement. Through

these analytical techniques, this study aimed to offer robust empirical evidence on factors shaping social media users' political attitudes in Malaysia.

Results and Discussions

Demographics of Respondents

The survey included 403 participants, providing a detailed dataset for analysis.

Age Distribution: Participants varied widely in age. Most were between 18 to 30 years old, making up 41.7% of the sample. This group was followed by those aged 41 to 50 years (22.6%), 31 to 40 years (13.4%), 51 to 60 years (17.4%), and over 61 years (5.0%), offering a broad view across different age groups.

Gender Representation: The gender split was nearly even, with 51.9% male and 48.1% female participants. This balance helps ensure that the study's findings reflect a wide range of views from both male and female social media users in Malaysia, supporting the validity of the results.

State of Residence: Participants came from various Malaysian states, providing regional insights into political engagement on social media. Most respondents were from Johor (41.9%), with Selangor (17.1%) next. Other states made up 41.0% of the sample, indicating wide geographical diversity.

Education Level: Educational backgrounds of the respondents also varied. The largest group had a first degree (38.5%), followed by diploma holders (30.8%), and those with secondary education (9.7%). A smaller number held master's degrees (16.1%) or PhDs (1.5%).

Overall, the demographic details of the respondents show that the sample was diverse and representative, covering various age groups, genders, educational levels, and locations across Malaysia. This diversity enhances the study's analysis and interpretation, providing a thorough understanding of how social media users in Malaysia view politics.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis of the research factors is presented in this section, with an emphasis on the factor loadings' considerable factor validity. The intensity and importance of the association between latent factors and observable variables, or items, are represented by factor loadings. The factor loadings and additional descriptive statistics for each factor are compiled in the table below.

Table 3
Factor Validity Significance of Factor Loadings

		Std.	Std.			Std.	Std.		
Factors	Items Mean	Error	Dv.	Factors	Items Mean	Error	Dv.		
Attitude	AT_1	3.826	0.122	0.868	Availability	A_1	4.189	0.122	0.771
	AT_2	3.558	0.122	0.963		A_2	4.022	0.122	0.847
	AT_3	3.851	0.122	0.786		A_3	3.251	0.122	1.020
Curiosity	C_1	3.658	0.122	0.943	Self-Efficacy	SE_1	3.427	0.122	0.884
	C_2	3.370	0.122	0.971		SE_2	3.400	0.122	0.875
	C_3	3.658	0.122	0.914		SE_3	3.469	0.122	0.880
Expectancy	E_1	2.931	0.122	0.989	Accessibility	AB_1	3.737	0.122	0.785
	E_2	3.040	0.122	1.015		AB_2	3.675	0.122	0.828
	E_3	3.335	0.122	0.926		AB_3	3.412	0.122	0.955
Sensibility	S_1	3.747	0.122	0.840	Perceived Value	PV_1	3.640	0.122	0.962
	S_2	3.305	0.122	0.981		PV_2	3.806	0.122	0.887
	S_3	3.806	0.122	0.855		PV_3	3.859	0.122	0.887
Subjective Norm	SN_1	3.060	0.122	0.388	Prosperity	P_1	3.739	0.122	0.854
	SN_2	3.891	0.122	0.786		P_2	3.682	0.122	0.856
	SN_3	3.397	0.122	0.911		P_3	3.675	0.122	0.858
Socializing	SZ_1	3.968	0.122	0.858	Progressive	PG_1	3.588	0.122	0.888
	SZ_2	3.888	0.122	0.800		PG_2	3.720	0.122	0.827
	SZ_3	3.908	0.122	0.784		PG_3	3.762	0.122	0.814
Source of Information	SI_1	3.638	0.122	0.887	Effective	EF_1	3.871	0.122	0.838
	SI_2	3.685	0.122	0.898		EF_2	3.789	0.122	0.856
	SI_3	3.206	0.122	0.981		EF_3	3.700	0.122	0.832
Communication Platform	CP_1	3.697	0.122	0.823	Intention to Engage	IT_1	3.320	0.122	0.996
	CP_2	4.002	0.122	0.747		IT_2	3.228	0.122	1.025
	CP_3	3.764	0.122	0.828		IT_3	3.176	0.122	1.014
Perceive Behavioural Control	PBC_1	3.400	0.122	0.875					
	PBC_2	3.241	0.122	0.968					
	PBC_3	3.459	0.122	0.916					

* N= 403, Std. Dv. Is for Standard Deviation

From the data presented in Table 3, it can be observed that most items demonstrate moderate to high factor loadings across their respective constructs, indicating a significant relationship between the observed variables and latent factors. Additionally, the descriptive statistics, including means, standard errors, and standard deviations, provide insights into the distribution and variability of responses for each item. Overall, the consistent and relatively high factor loadings suggest that the items are suitable for measuring their intended constructs and can be considered reliable indicators of social media users' attitudes and behaviours towards political engagement.

Reliability Analysis

In this section, we present the reliability analysis for all items included in the factor constructs. The reliability of the factors is evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and

average variance extracted (AVE). These metrics provide insights into the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement model. The table below summarizes the reliability analysis for each factor construct.

Table 4
Reliability Analysis for All Items

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	CA	CR	AVE
Curiosity	C_1	0.868	0.828	0.897	0.745
	C_2	0.881			
	C_3	0.840			
Expectancy	E_1	0.791	0.735	0.848	0.651
	E_2	0.816			
	E_3	0.813			
Sensibility	S_1	0.800	0.739	0.851	0.656
	S_2	0.801			
	S_3	0.827			
Socializing	SZ_1	0.839	0.844	0.906	0.762
	SZ_2	0.889			
	SZ_3	0.890			
Source of Information	SI_1	0.839	0.783	0.874	0.698
	SI_2	0.875			
	SI_3	0.789			
Communication Platform	CP_1	0.853	0.820	0.893	0.736
	CP_2	0.864			
	CP_3	0.856			
Availability	A_1	0.591	0.601	0.773	0.536
	A_2	0.796			
	A_3	0.791			
Self Efficacy	SE_1	0.878	0.856	0.912	0.777
	SE_2	0.914			
	SE_3	0.850			
Accessibility	AB_1	0.803	0.742	0.854	0.662
	AB_2	0.866			
	AB_3	0.768			
Prosperity	P_1	0.881	0.858	0.913	0.779
	P_2	0.895			
	P_3	0.871			
Progressive	PG_1	0.865	0.861	0.915	0.782
	PG_2	0.901			
	PG_3	0.887			

Construct	Item	Outer Loading	CA	CR	AVE
Effective	EF_1	0.879	0.868	0.919	0.790
	EF_2	0.890			
	EF_3	0.898			
Attitude	AT_1	0.765	0.742	0.854	0.661
	AT_2	0.874			
	AT_3	0.797			
Subjective Norm	SN_1	0.534	0.559	0.765	0.529
	SN_2	0.780			
	SN_3	0.833			
Perceived Behavioural Control	PBC_1	0.872	0.738	0.851	0.657
	PBC_2	0.839			
	PBC_3	0.712			
Perceived Value	PV_1	0.882	0.903	0.940	0.839
	PV_2	0.937			
	PV_3	0.927			
Intention to engage	IT_1	0.867	0.864	0.917	0.786
	IT_2	0.897			
	IT_3	0.895			

* CA = Cronbach's Alpha, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted

The results from Table 4 show a high level of internal consistency and reliability for each construct's measurement model. Cronbach's alpha values are above 0.7 for most factors, indicating that the items within each construct consistently measure the same underlying concept. Composite reliability values also exceed 0.7, confirming that the constructs effectively capture the variability of the observed variables. The average variance extracted (AVE) values range from 0.561 to 0.667, showing the proportion of variance captured by the construct compared to measurement error. These results confirm that the measurement models are reliable and valid for assessing social media users' attitudes and behaviours towards political engagement.

However, it's important to consider the specific context and implications of each factor. Factors like "Curiosity," "Expectancy," and "Self-Efficacy" reflect personal motivations and beliefs about political engagement on social media. High reliability and validity for these factors suggest a strong tendency among users to actively engage in online political discussions. On the other hand, factors like "Source of Information" and "Communication Platform" emphasize the dependence on social media for political news and perceptions of its role as a communication medium with political leaders. Understanding these factors helps explain how social media influences political discourse and user behaviour, which in turn affects democratic participation and civic engagement.

Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into the attitudes of social media users towards politics in Malaysia. Using a framework based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Value Theory, the research identified key factors that shape how individuals interact with political content on these platforms. The findings highlight the importance of factors such as attitude, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms in influencing online political behaviours. These insights are crucial for policymakers, political analysts, and social media practitioners who aim to create a more informed and participatory political environment in Malaysia. By applying these findings, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions and communication strategies to more effectively engage citizens and enhance democratic discourse on social media platforms.

The contribution of this study is multifaceted. Firstly, it bridges a gap in existing knowledge by integrating two theoretical frameworks—Theory of Planned Behaviour and Value Theory—to examine political engagement on social media within a Malaysian context. This dual-theory approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and sociocultural factors influencing online political behaviour. Secondly, the study provides empirical data specific to Malaysia, a region with unique political dynamics and social media usage patterns, thereby adding a valuable dimension to global discussions on digital political engagement. Lastly, by highlighting the specific attitudes and behaviours of Malaysian social media users, the study offers actionable insights that can inform the design of more effective political communication strategies, ultimately contributing to enhanced civic participation and a more robust democratic process in the digital age.

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