



Perceived airfare fairness and patronage of domestic airlines in Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of perceived airfare fairness on domestic airline Patronage in Nigeria. The study population comprised seventy five thousand (75,000) passengers of registered and Operational Domestic Airlines operating within the Nigerian airspace and the sample size for the study constitute three hundred and eighty two (382) passengers of the airlines which was determined using the Krejice and Morgan (1970) table. Furthermore, three hundred and eighty-two (382) copies of structured questionnaire was distributed to airline passengers at the respective waiting lounges of the airports while three hundred and seventy-seven (377) were retrieved and used for the study. Anova statistic was used to test the hypotheses postulated in the study. The result of the analysis revealed that perceived airfare fairness does not significantly influence domestic airline patronage in Nigeria. We concluded that perceived airfare fairness does not significantly affect domestic airline patronage in the authors therefore suggests that the domestic airline service providers in Nigeria should endeavor to make their airfare to be attractive in order to improve their level of patronage

Key words: Airfare Fairness, Nigerian Domestic Airlines and Customer Patronage.

Introduction

The Nigerian airline industry has a unique historical evolution. The history of aviation in Nigeria dates back to 1925 in Kano when the Royal Air Force (RAF), a British pilot made a breath-taking, but safe landing on the horse race course in Kano, thus going down in history as the first recorded aviation activity in Nigeria. In the early 1930s, an enterprising pilot also made a flight with a few fare paying passengers in a sea plane between Lagos and Warri.

This became an annual business for a few years thereby creating the need for more aero planes. On hearing this development, a representative of the Air Ministry in London visited Nigeria to inspect what could then be appropriately described as “landing grounds”. This however led to the selection of six points in Nigeria for plane landing namely Maiduguri, Oshogbo, Lagos, Minna, Kano and Kaduna. In August, 1958, the Federal Government of Nigeria in partnership with the British Office of Aviation Control (BOAC) and Elder Dempster lines formed the West African Airways. This single historic move heralded the genesis of the airline industry in Nigeria (Bassey & Joseph, 2014).



Patronage is a situation where an individual displays a conscious effort in choosing products and services that will satisfy his or her need (s) through the process of analyzing situations that he thinks would be rewarding and relatively satisfying amidst some challenges faced in the course of fulfilling his own desires. This explain why individuals can exhibit unconditional attachment and affection towards objects or persons (Adiele & Grend, 2016). Patronage in the aviation industry entails the deliberate act of a passenger to consistently fly with a particular airline instead of going to other airline service operators. Patronage could be defined as a passenger's selection of an airline from a set of alternatives. More so, Patronage can be viewed from the perspectives of being inductive in nature. This suggests that the level of patronage is induced by some external conditions that prevail at a given time. This dimension of patronage dominates the business and service industry or market and it accounts for the array of literature on customer patronage (Adiele & Etuk, 2017).

In Nigeria, patronage can be viewed or classified from two dimensions: conditional and unconditional patronage. Unconditional patronage is mostly associated with expectations which are not tied to reward for financial exchanges such as preference for issues that are affectively and psychologically oriented, particularly that gives them joy and satisfaction. The conditional patronage is common to goods and services that an individual purposefully or consciously maximizes to address his economic needs. When the expectations are less than the benefits received, quantitatively, the extent of patronage can fluctuate and will thus depend on the alternatives available (Adiele & Grend, 2016).

Previous research in the Nigerian aviation sector has shown that airline patronage is heavily dependent on some factors which include fare and flight frequency, convenience, non-stop flight, reliability, easy accessibility to airports by passengers, service quality, perceived airfare fairness, flight availability, passenger disposition towards airline image (Jim- woo park, Rodger and Cheng, 2006; Hart & Rosenbergewill (2004) . Analysis of the above identified predictors of airline patronage suggests that they can exert direct or indirect influences. This further depicts interplay of complex variables that determines the airline choice decisions in a given economy.

Different economies of the world have peculiar characteristics which shape the competitiveness and dynamics of each sub sector of the economy. Nigeria has its own peculiarities, especially in the aviation sector. The Nigerian aviation sector is projected to be one of the highest revenue earners for the country because of its enormous opportunities. Nigeria, the most populous African nation is endowed with natural, human, material and financial resources which made the country a favorable destination for other nations of the world. This notwithstanding, the Nigerian aviation sector is faced with numerous problems which may have affected the level of patronage observed by Nigerian domestic airline service providers

A major problem confronting the Nigeria Aviation sector is low patronage of their services which is evidenced in stumpy commitment exhibited by customers of commercial airline operating firms in the country. The challenges that are quite noticeable within the aviation sector include overcrowded hall and traffic, obsolete and malfunctioning air navigation equipment, poor interaction and processes experienced in the purchase of air ticket (online & offline), persistent flight delays, regular flight cancellations without information to passengers and incessant plane crashes over the years are common scenarios in the industry

Furthermore, some of the additional challenges experienced in the Nigerian aviation sector include: poor service quality, indiscriminate pricing of air tickets and price discrimination, poor operational effectiveness, inability of some of the airline firms to build and sustain a good corporate image, failure of airline service providers to constantly make available airplanes at the right time needed by the passengers, long hours of passengers waiting time without



compensation, inadequate attentions to customers' complaints are some of the common challenges witnessed in the Nigerian aviation sector.

However, the factors that could be responsible for the problems encountered in the Nigerian airline service sector may include: lack or absence of aviation operational guidelines and policy, where a policy exists, inability of the airline service providers to operate within the confines of the policy, lack of sustained competition amongst airline service providers, poor supervisory role by the aviation authorities, corruption, irresponsible attitude displayed by some of the airline service providers, lack of professional attitude, poor customer relationship management and courtesy. All these scenarios have arguably and adversely affected the Nigerian aviation sector and its level of patronage.

The state of business climate and infrastructure are crucial to sector performance but could it influence the passenger behavior within the context of airline service delivery? Despite the relative challenges facing the aviation sector in Nigeria, what is the degree of patronage exhibited by passengers towards domestic airlines? Could the peculiarities of the aviation sector in Nigeria predict the magnitude of patronage towards airlines in Nigeria?

A review of marketing literature revealed that there is paucity of empirical research on perceived airfare fairness and patronage of domestic airlines in Nigeria. Most of the studies conducted outside Nigeria in the airline industry aimed at determining choice of Airline Alliance, the Impact of Airline Service Failures on Traveler's Carrier Choice. None of these studies considered the effect of perceived airfare fairness on domestic airline patronage in Nigeria.

Related studies in Nigeria were conducted on the list of factors influencing airline choice making in Nigeria; and on the effects of airline service quality on airline image and passenger loyalty. Based on the earlier discussion about the uncertainty towards domestic airlines operation and also the magnitude and direction of the challenges influencing the patronage of domestic airlines, this study seeks to assess the effect of perceived airfare fairness on domestic airline patronage in Nigeria. determinants or predictors of domestic airline patronage in Nigeria. The findings may provide insights as to the specific factors influencing domestic airline patronage in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Perceived Airfare Fairness and Patronage of Domestic Airlines.

Aksoy *et al* (2003) opined that one of the major determinants of airline patronage or choice is air fare or price paid to purchase air ticket (perceived airfare fairness). Airfare is defined as consumers' assessment of whether a seller's price can be reasonably justified (Xia, *et al*, 2004). Fairness has been defined as a judgment of whether an outcome is reasonable, acceptable or just (Bolton *et al*, 2003). When airline's airfare is perceived to be fair by passengers, it improves patronage and profit level of the airline service operators. The price sensitivity of the demand for airlines is directly related to the possibilities of substitution for airlines. Most air passengers are sensitive to airline ticket price and adopt price differentiation strategy using a discriminatory pricing policy to alter passenger's patronage behavior and to respond to a competitive environment so that their revenue is maximized.

In addition, airfare or ticket price is one of the most important determinant or factor influencing air passengers' patronage behavior. Airfare should be carefully ascertained or fixed bearing in mind the ticket price of other competing airlines in the industry. In fixing an airline's ticket price, an optimum amount should be charged which will be neither too high nor very low to recover



operational expenses. Furthermore, passenger's price sensitivity analysis should be carried out with respect to business and non-business market segments in order to ascertain when and when not to increase air ticket price. To a business traveler/passenger, an increase in airfare may not be too significant so far he gets to his desired destination in time and safely, while a non-business traveler may decide not to fly with a particular airline due to an increase in airfare.

The pricing of scheduled airline fares is a complex matter and most passengers have little or no idea on how it is done (Driver, 2001). The price charged by airlines per mile is not standard for all passengers in a particular flight or when compared with miles flown on other routes. This multiplicity in fares enables the airlines to adopt discriminatory pricing by having different requirements or conditions for each type of fare. This is done by determining the amount of ticket flexibility. When the type of ticket purchased has flexibility it enables passengers on a scheduled flight to make changes to switch to another flight without notice or penalty. More so, ticket flexibility enables a passenger to book a flight almost on demand. The higher the ticket flexibility both for business travelers and leisure travelers, the higher the patronage.

From the consumer's perspective, the monetary cost of something is what is given up or sacrificed to obtain a product. Research has shown that price is one of the determinants of customer satisfaction and patronage (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). The price to be paid for a service determines, in passenger's mind, the level of quality to be demanded. Offering good service to passengers may not be good enough to attract and retain passengers. Airline passengers now seek better value for their money which is a combination of fares and quality.

Lower airfares and improved road infrastructure are the major determinants of airports competitiveness and patronage (Fuellhart 2007). Cheng (2008) argued that previous studies have not included airfare and schedule convenience on a detailed level and these could ultimately influence passenger's choice of airline to fly. From the foregoing discussions, it appears that a relationship exist between perceived airfare fairness and patronage of domestic airlines.

Customer Patronage

Patronage arises when an individual internally analyzes situations and such situations can be self-sustaining despite the challenges faced in the course of satisfying his own desires. This explains why individuals can exhibit unconditional attachment and affection towards objects or persons. Patronage in the aviation industry entails the deliberate act of a passenger to consistently fly with a particular airline instead of going to the competitors. In addition, patronage is defined as a passenger's selection of an airline from a set of alternatives.

People patronize organization products/services at one time or the other. Patronage is burn out of a desire to be committed to an organization either based on its service quality or perceived service qualities. Hence, the extent to which a passenger will patronize the services of an airline depends on how the customer perceives the airline's service quality and how the customer thinks and feels that the conditions of the airline's customer service is consistent with his/her service expectations.

The selection or choice of patronage is determined by various factors including the comparative attributes of airlines in the consideration set (Wilfred, *et al* 2012). The passenger would be expected to patronize the airline that generates the highest level of utility. Other factors that can influence patronage include convenience, security, reliability, on-board crew behavior, fare and



schedule of flight, socio-demographic characteristics, etc. (Wilfred *et al* 2012; Okeudo & Chikwendu, 2013).

The Nigeria airlines in the 21st century often compete for customers in order to increase their market share. The possibility of any of these airline firms to achieve their aims is predicated on their ability to evolve services (products) that will satisfy the needs and wants of their chosen target customer better than their competitors. Their service quality delivery strategies should also be improved while looking for new avenues to regularly attract and retain their customers.

The importance or essence of repeat customer patronage is that an increase in volume of sales will significantly impact on an airline's profit level and improve their level of business viability. Accordingly, and in line with previous studies, (Wilfred *et al*, 2012; Okeudo and Chikwendu, 2013; Mukarramah *et al*/2014; Johan and Dion 2013; and especially Ikeogu *et al* 2013; this study views customer patronage as the means of a respondents rating for an airline's brand loyalty, customer retention and repeat purchase behavior.

Notably, the measures of customer patronage differ from one industry to another. In some firms, patronage may be used interchangeably with business performance. In a study carried out by Adiele *et al* (2011), on "the impact of corporate Citizenship on Business Performance: Marketing implications for Nigerian organization; profit margin was used as one of the measures of business performance which was predicated on consistent customer patronage. Asiegbuet *al* (2011), in measuring the "marketing performance of Nigeria Domestic and Industrial Product organizations adopted profitability, sales volume and market share.

Johan and Dion (2013), in their study "Airline service quality in south Africa and Malaysia- An International customer expectations approach used brand loyalty and flight frequency and aircraft type as the measures of customer patronage. Similarly, Okeudo and Chikwendu in their study on "Effects of airline service quality on airline image and passengers' loyalty: Findings from Arik and Nigeria passengers ", used airline image and repeat purchase to proxy customer patronage.

In addition, recently, Ikeogu *et al* (2013), in their study "A comparative analysis of quality of customer service and the relationship with the level of patronage in the Nigerian Aviation Industry adopted customer retention and customer service as measures of customer patronage in the Nigeria aviation sector.

Therefore, in this study, we adopted the following as measures of airline customer patronage: Brand loyalty, customer retention and repeat purchase behavior. A conceptual framework of perceived airfare fairness and patronage in the Nigerian aviation sector is depicted on the next page as follows:

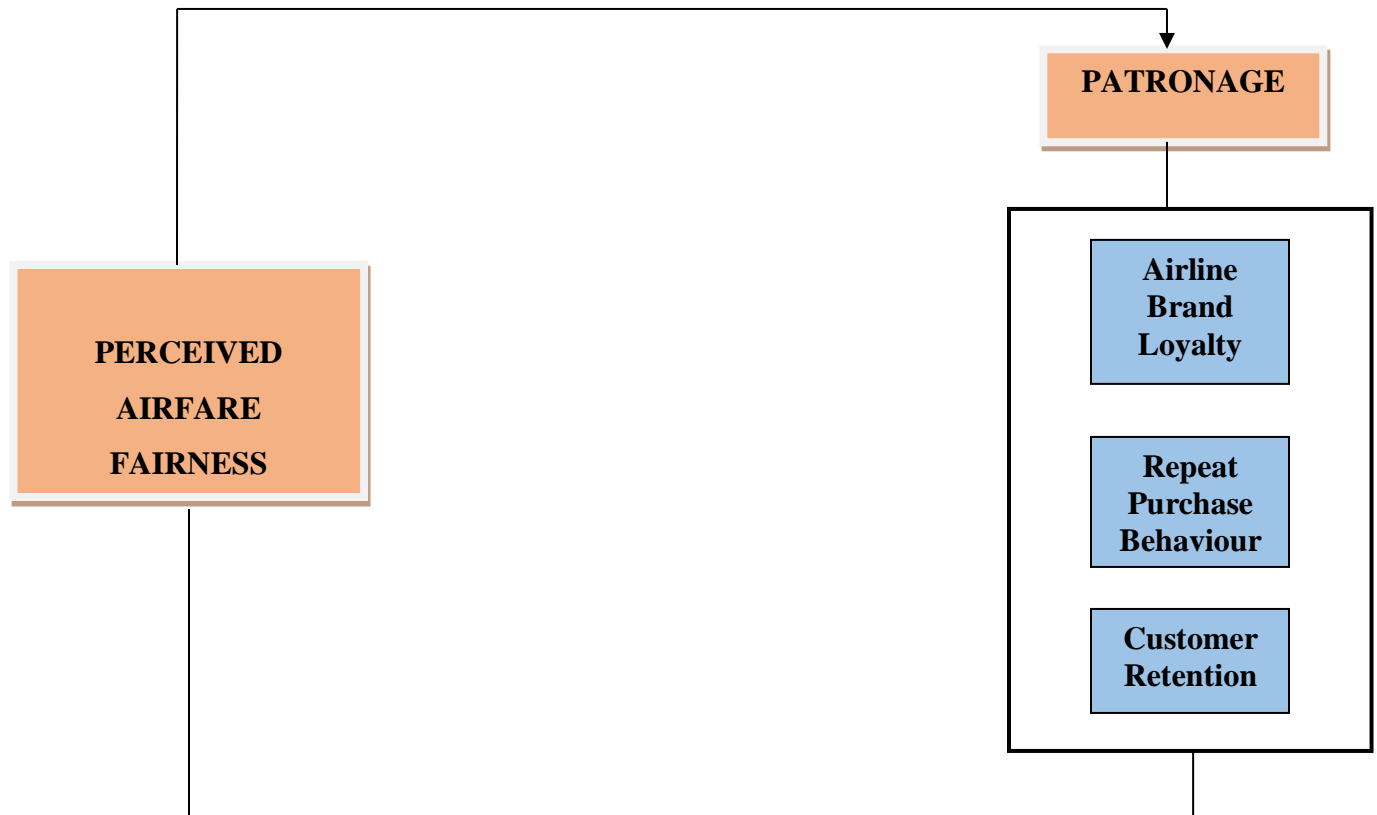


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Perceived Operational Effectiveness and Patronage in the Nigerian Aviation Sector.

Source: Researchers' Conceptualization from the review of related literature, 2017

Study Methodology

The research approach adopted in this study is the non- experimental research type and it was designed based on the cross-sectional survey method which offers a wide coverage and permits generalizability of research findings. The population for this study comprised all users of the existing functional domestic airline operators in Nigeria which are estimated to be seventy five thousand 75,000. The airlines considered in this study are the current, registered, functional and operational domestic airlines which are holders of air operational certificate as at August (2016).

Furthermore, two- stage sampling technique was the method adopted in this study. At first stage, all the airports in Nigeria were stratified into four major airports based on 2015 FAAN zones and regions classification of airport to identify the major hub airports namely: Murtala Mohammed International Airport (Lagos), Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport (Abuja), Port Harcourt International Airport (Port Harcourt) and Amino Kano International Airport (Kano).

The researchers randomly selected two airports for the study. These Airports are the Murtala Mohammed International Airport Ikeja, Lagos and the Port Harcourt International Airport in Rivers State. These Airports are considered to be trade hubs that have the largest human traffic due to the heavy presence of oil and gas industry, and high commercial activities, which increased the



migration level of Nigerians to these states. Furthermore, Murtala Mohammed International Airport Ikeja Lagos serve as a major takeoff and landing point for most of the Nigerian domestic airlines that operate and conveys air passengers to other states and airports in the country.

At the second stage, all the passengers who were willing to participate in the study were given copies of the questionnaire up to the number assigned for each hub airport. In determining the sample size for this study, we adopted the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table.

TABLE 1: Table for Determining Sample Size for a Finite Population.

<i>N</i>	<i>S'</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S'</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>S'</i>
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	100000	384

Note.—*N* is population size. *S'* is sample size.

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

The sample size for this study comprised three hundred and eighty two (382) passengers / customers of the Nigerian domestic airlines. We randomly distributed 222 copies of the questionnaire to passengers at the waiting lounge of Murtala Mohammed International Airport and 160 copies of the questionnaire to the passengers at the waiting lounge of Port-Harcourt international airport Rivers State respectively (See Table 2).



Table: 2: Questionnaire Distribution Rate

S/No	Airports	Quantity distributed	Percentage of questionnaire distributed %
1	MurtalaMuhammed International Airport Lagos.	222	58.1%
2	Port Harcourt International Airport Rivers State.	160	41.9%
	Total	382	100%

Source: Research Data, 2017

The reason for having distributed the highest number of (222) copies of the questionnaire to Lagos, is because it has the major airport in Nigeria; the Murtala Muhammad Airport Domestic terminal. Most Nigerians travel through Lagos when travelling by air and Lagos has the highest population than other states which provided Lagos with the highest air passengers in Nigeria. Similarly, the choice of these two airports is based on the nature of the cities where they operate. These cities selected are served by national airports and are considered favorable destinations for domestic travelers.

Regarding our source of data collection, 382 copies of structured questionnaire was distributed to passengers in waiting lounges at the two airports who intended to travel with any of the domestic airlines; that were also willing to participate in the study. From the 382 copies of questionnaire distributed, 377 were successfully completed and retrieved and were used for the study. More so, the validity of the scales used in this study was assessed for content, construct and face validity. The content validity was ensured based on review of similar constructs from previous studies. The questionnaire used by Pakdil *et al* (2007), Haynes (1994), and especially Gilbert and Wong (2003), concerning passengers' expectation of airline services in Hong- Kong was adapted, modified and refined to suit our study in the Nigerian context.

However, reliability was ensured by pretesting the questionnaire on at least 50 persons who have traveled by air in Nigeria within the past one year who were not part of the main study. The researcher used the Cronbach's Alpha analysis to ascertain the reliability and internal consistency of the measurement instrument. This was facilitated with the statistical packages for social science (SPSS) version 20.0.

4. TEST OF HYPOTHESES, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS.

This section presented the hypotheses postulated for the study; the results obtained from our survey and ornately discussed the observed findings

H01: There is no significant difference between Perceived Airfare Fairness and Patronage of Domestic Airlines in Nigeria



Table.3: Anova results in respect to the level of domestic airline patronage based on Perceived Airfare Fairness.

Item	Constructs/variables	N	Mean	F-value	Sig	P-value	Remarks
1.	Perceived Airfare Fairness Considerate airline fare Airline price attractiveness Airline reasonable ticket price	40 194 143	0.5582 ^a 0.5945 ^{ab} 0.6302 ^b	4.420	0.13	0.05	Ho accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Variations in level of domestic airline patronage based on Perceived Airline Fairness

Considering the influence of perceived airfare fairness on domestic airline patronage in Table 3, Item 1, and the variations across the categories or sub-components showed differences in their mean index. Despite the variations in the mean index, the sig-value (0.13) was greater than the p-value (0.05), thus not statistically significant. This implies that the Ho is accepted meaning that there is no significance difference between perceived airfare fairness and domestic airline patronage in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

This section is concerned with the discussion of major findings obtained from the test of hypothesis postulated in this study. The discussion is presented as follows:

Perceived Airfare Fairness and Patronage of Domestic Airlines in Nigeria.

The result shown in Table 3, item 1 revealed that there is no significant difference between perceived airfare fairness and patronage of domestic airlines in Nigeria. The sig-value (0.13) was greater than the p-value (0.05), thus not statistically significant. The result implied that perceived airfare fairness do not significantly influence or contribute to increase in domestic airline patronage in Nigeria.

However, this finding contradicts the views of Zeithaml and Bitner (2000). They argued that price is one of the determinants of customer satisfaction and patronage. When an airline's airfare is perceived to be fair by its passengers it improves patronage and also the profit level of the airline service providers. A critical analysis of the result above depicts that price and airfare fairness may not be major determinants of domestic airline patronage in Nigeria. For instance, to a business traveler/passenger, an increase in airfare may not be too significant so far he gets to his desired destination in time and safely.

Conversely, a non-business traveler may decide not to fly with a particular airline due to an increase in airfare. Therefore, the price sensitivity of the demand for airlines is directly related to the possibilities of substitution for airlines and the need to travel. It is important for the airline firms to carry out price sensitivity analysis with respect to business and non-business marketing segments in order to ascertain when and when not to increase air ticket price. In summary, the result showed that there is no significant difference between perceived airfare fairness and domestic airline patronage in Nigeria. From the findings and foregoing discussions, we conclude that perceived airfare fairness does not affect domestic airline patronage in Nigeria.



Conclusion

This article has elaborately discussed the effect of perceived airfare fairness on domestic airline patronage in Nigeria. The findings from our analyses showed that perceived airfare fairness does not significantly influence domestic airline patronage in Nigeria, but rather, one of the determinant factor is the purpose of travel. From the empirical evidence observed thus far, we concluded that perceived airfare fairness does not significantly affect domestic airline patronage in Nigeria and that the management of Nigerian domestic airline service providers should adopt attractive and competitive pricing strategies in the sale of their airfare in order to increase their level of patronage and to enhance their sustainability.

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