

The Relationship between the Ramadan Bazaar and the Attraction and Dissemination of Information: A Case of International Tourists

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Abstract—Many people regard food events as part of gastronomic tourism and important in enhancing visitors' experiences. Realizing the importance and contribution of food events to a country's economy, the Malaysia government is undertaking greater efforts to promote such tourism activities to international tourists. Among other food events, the Ramadan bazaar is a unique food culture event, which receives significant attention from the Malaysia Ministry of Tourism. This study reports the empirical investigation into the international tourists' perceptions, attraction towards the Ramadan bazaar and willingness in disseminating the information. Using the Ramadan bazaar at Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur as the data collection setting, results revealed that the Ramadan bazaar attributes (food and beverages, events and culture) significantly influenced the international tourist attraction to such a bazaar. Their high level of experience and satisfaction positively influenced their willingness to disseminate information. The positive response among the international tourists indicates that the Ramadan bazaar as gastronomic tourism can be used in addition to other tourism products as a catalyst to generate and boost the local economy. The related authorities that are closely associated with the tourism industry therefore should not ignore this indicator but continue to take proactive action in promoting the gastronomic event as one of the major tourist attractions.

Keywords—Ramadan bazaar, international tourists, attraction, dissemination, information.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE continual globalization of the tourism industry has no doubt spilled over into Malaysia and tourism is becoming progressively more important, contributing extensively to economic as well as socio-cultural development. This is evident from tourists' receipts, which continually increase from year to year. For instance, tourist arrivals surpassed 19 million with an increase of 7.9 percent or 21,505,120 tourists in 2009 compared to 19,993,804 in 2008 [32]. This situation is a result of the wide and varied tourism products and activities

promoted, including marine tourism, spas, golfing, shopping, sightseeing, recreational activities, river cruises, and many others. Of these, events and festivals are also becoming new main attractions, and motivating factors for international tourists to choose Malaysia as their travel destination [32]. MICE or business events encompassing meetings, conventions, conferences and exhibitions are being held throughout Malaysia. The Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Directory reported that Kuala Lumpur is among the top five meeting destinations in Asia Pacific with over 1.18 million international business visitors involved in such events in 2009 [21]. The glories of Malaysia for the international tourists are also apparent through the social events and religious festivals. Thaipusam, Malaysia, International Shoe Festival and KL Sunday, 1 Malaysia Family Fair are some of the examples. Besides these, food events are also becoming important in promoting Malaysia as a tourist destination. The former Minister of Tourism, Dato' Sri Dr. Ng Yen Yen claimed that Malaysian food is unique as it represents cuisines from various cultures and, most importantly, tourists spend about RM9.7 billion or 17 percent of their total expenses on food and drinks in the country [9].

Because of the importance and contribution of such events to the country's economy, greater efforts are being undertaken in promoting gastronomic and food events to the international tourists [32]. Some of the food events held in the country are the Fabulous Food Malaysia, the Malaysia International Gourmet Festival, and the Malaysian International Food and Beverage Trade Fair. Among those examples, the Ramadan bazaar is another unique food culture event that is receiving attention from the Ministry of Tourism. The Ramadan bazaar, in particular, consists of special food stalls that come alive in the late afternoon, selling food and its culture in conjunction with Muslims' fasting month [3]. These activities not only occur in Muslim countries, but can also be seen in non-Muslim countries. In Malaysia, the Ramadan bazaar without doubt is becoming a yearly event with a huge array of food from traditional Malay delicacies to local beverages [23]. Among the designated sites and the most popular site for the Ramadan bazaar in Malaysia is Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur which offers a typical and traditional variety of foods including the authentic "bubur lambuk" or traditional Malay porridge.

Scholars argue that although Muslims are not encouraged to overspend or follow their lust with regard to food and other

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things during this month, the Ramadan bazaar attracts many people [1]. Reports reveal that the Ramadan bazaar in Kampung Baru is always packed with people of all races including foreign tourists [8]. This notion clearly indicates that the bazaar has the potential to be promoted to the international tourists. The former Deputy Tourism Minister, Dato Sri Sulaiman Abdul Rahman Taib noted that, though the Ramadan bazaar is a Muslim event, it is able to attract the international tourists and he urged the tourist agents to aggressively promote the bazaar [13]. However, the extent of their perceptions and what attracts the international tourists to visit the Ramadhan bazaar, as well as their level of satisfaction and willingness to disseminate information, or the experience of attending such a bazaar to their fellow countrymen, have not yet been explored. In other words, the relationship between the Ramadan bazaar, the attraction for international tourists and disseminating information behaviour has not been widely researched. This study is therefore aiming to reveal such issues and hypothesizes;

H1. The international tourist attraction to the Ramadan bazaar significantly influences the disseminating information behavior

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Ramadan & Food

The term 'Ramadan' is universally understood by people across the world as it is associated with fasting and is one of the five pillars of Islam. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim calendar when Muslims with a few exceptions are obligated to fast during the hours of daylight until sunset for twenty nine to thirty days [15]. Muslims are required to abstain not just from food and drink, but learn to be patient and persevering and feelings of gratefulness are awakened in them during this fasting month [17]. This is the month of giving and mercy and Allah blesses the believers with forgiveness and great rewards [26]. Apart from other religious obligations, food plays significant roles in this holy month and people look forward to enjoying many traditional foods prepared or sold through a Ramadan bazaar [6]. Muslims around the world perform the same types of worship during Ramadan; however the Ramadan bazaar and food may vary from one country to another or even from town to village. The Ramadan bazaar has multiple elements including food, culture and a sense of feast to be shared, not only among the Muslims, but among non-Muslims as well [30]. In Egypt, for instance, the streets are busy with people rushing to buy Ramadan specialties and traditional cuisines like Konafah, Qamar Eldin, Zabadi, Torshi Baladi and many others [7] and Ramadan becomes a passion with the gas turned on in thousands of kitchens [33]. Oriental Egyptian foods served along the streets, together with Sufi songs, are very popular among the international tourists [2].

Turkey, on the other hand, promotes Ramadan through the opening of food and beverage stands and other activities. Sweets always have a special place in the Turkish Ramadan menu which displays the richness of Turkish cuisine,

especially *gülleç* (a traditional Ramadan dessert of layers of thin cornstarch pastry soaked in rosewater-infused milk), *kadayif dolma* (shredded pastry filled with walnuts), *revani* (dense sponge cakes soaked with sugar syrup), *helva* (a confection made from farina and pine nuts), candied pumpkin with nuts, baklava, and *lokum* (Turkish delight) [30]. Similar activities also occur in other Muslim countries, whereby Ramadan not only provides a bonus to food traders and sellers to intensify their income, but promotes food tourism among the international tourists as well [16].

B. Ramadan Bazaar in Malaysia

Various traditional and tasty foods sell at the Ramadan bazaar and it is considered one of the best activities in the holy month of Ramadan in Malaysia [27]. The Ramadan bazaar is normally held by the local vendors and hawkers in several approved spots or streets throughout the country with the operational hours between 3.00 pm and 7.30 pm [22]. The Ramadan bazaar welcomes the locals and international visitors of various backgrounds and ages with a wide selection of food delicacies. The changing lifestyle, the economy and being busy with work, contribute to the popularity of the Ramadan bazaar [28]. A variety of delicacies are available from basketfuls of *kuih-muih* (local cakes or sweets) to rows of other main and side dishes like chicken 'satay' (skewered marinated chicken grilled over a charcoal flame) *ayam golek* (grilled herbs marinated chicken), grilled fish, *murtabak* (meat or chicken patty with onions, herbs and egg), *tepung pelita* (sweets) and many others [32]. Visiting the Ramadan bazaar is just like taking a culinary walk through Malaysia as it serves visitors with all kinds of food [32] and the Ramadan bazaar never fails in bringing out the best of Malaysian food. It truly portrays goodwill and food cultural harmony among Malaysians, visitors and even tourists [4].

The Ramadan bazaar at Kampung Baru, which is located at the center of Kuala Lumpur, is one of the top Ramadan bazaars among Malaysians and it is becoming well-known among the international tourists. This bazaar has attracted foreigners who want to taste the local delicacies as well as experience the unique atmosphere of the bazaar [31]. In spite of the local delicacies, the conveniences and accessibility of the location are also drawing the visitors' attention. The location is well built with basic infrastructures, public transportations like Light Rail Transit (LRT) and it is close to most international hotels. The Ramadan bazaar at Kampung Baru acts as a showcase of Malay food culture to international tourists [4]. In addition, the Kampung Baru mosque is the most popular mosque serving the tasty *bubur lambuk* or Malay traditional porridge [32] and it becomes well talked about among Malaysians compared to other mosques during the holy month of Ramadan. As the Ramadan bazaar portrays a bundled package of food cultural events, the Ministry of Tourism has perceived that this bazaar has the potential to be promoted as a Malaysian tourism event like *Thaipusam* [24].

C. Disseminating Information Behaviour

From a tourism perspective, disseminating information

behavior relates to the intention of visitors to recommend or revisit the events experienced in the particular destination and this process basically relies on the quality of the attractions that have been experienced by the tourists [25]. Positive or negative attitudes and future behavioral intentions can be measured after tourists have experienced the specific products or services. If tourists have a positive experience with tourism events or festivals, they tend to have a positive attitude and vice versa [20]. Studies have demonstrated that there is a relationship between tourist satisfaction or dissatisfaction and intention to revisit and positive or negative word-of-mouth [5], [18], [19], [34] and the degree of satisfaction significantly affects customer retention, repurchase intention and revisiting [12]. Scholars have proposed a hypothetical model in reaction to the causal relationship between pull and push motivations, satisfaction and destination loyalty and further claimed tourists with favorable attitudes towards a particular product or destination will then express their intention to purchase or visit the destination [35] and the effect of service quality on behavioral intention is completely mediated by satisfaction [29].

Tourists' satisfaction also significantly influences the quality of life including life in general, leisure and non-leisure experiences, loyalty, recommendations (WOM) and return intentions [20]. In the case of food, positive food images in the tourists' minds are crucial in generating revisiting intentions and recommendations to others [11]. Food festival participants in Northeast Iowa were primarily motivated via WOM [10]. Consequently, the international tourist's word-of-mouth communication and recommending or disseminating information behavior have started to receive significant interest among tourism field researchers [14].

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sampling and Instrument

A descriptive research design using a quantitative approach through a cross sectional study was applied with a self-reported and self-administered questionnaire. The sample population came from among the international tourists who visited the Ramadan bazaar at Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. The Kampung Baru Ramadan bazaar was chosen, as it is the most popular spot among the international tourists during Ramadan month and is situated at the heart of Kuala Lumpur city. As this study will also establish a fundamental basis for other similar future studies, using Kampung Baru as a contextual setting for data collection is therefore justified.

The survey instrument was developed into four major sections. Each section contained questions addressing the variables that suit the research objectives. Section A comprised twelve questions using nominal scales and focused on respondents' demographic profiles such as gender, age, marital status, education, occupation and country of origin and additional questions including length of stay, the main purpose of the visit, frequency of visit, preferred dining outlet, gastronomic event attended before, and type of gastronomic event attended. Items in Section B were concerned with the

factors attracting the international tourists toward the Ramadan bazaar and were based on (i) event attributes (seven items), (ii) food attributes (eight items) and (iii) cultural attributes (seven items). Fourteen items were used in Section C in determining international levels of experience and satisfaction with the Ramadan bazaar. Section D (six items) was designed to investigate the willingness of the international tourists to disseminate information on their experiences of the Ramadan bazaar. Respondents were required to translate their views on a five type Likert scale ranging from 1 with "totally disagree" to 5 "totally agree". As most of the questions were mainly developed by researchers, a pilot study was initially conducted among the international tourists to verify and confirm the reliability and validity of the items used. All comments and recommendations were considered and some further changes were made before arriving at a final description of the survey instrument.

B. Data Collection

The survey was personally conducted by the researchers for two weeks during Ramadan month at three sections of the Kampung Baru Ramadan bazaar, Kuala Lumpur, which were Jalan Raja Alang, Jalan Raja Muda Musa and Jalan Raja Uda. Potential international tourists, mostly Caucasian and Middle Eastern, were approached to participate in the survey. Prior to answering the questionnaire, each of the respondents was briefed about confidentiality and anonymity through the information sheet attached to the questionnaire. In the light of positive feedback and the absence of any obvious problems with either the instrument or the process, a total of 180 responses were obtained. The reliability test was then undertaken for Sections B, C and D separately. The result showed that the instrument and items used were reliable with a coefficient alpha value at 0.67 for Section B, 0.86 for Section C and 0.71 for Section D.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on frequency, 62.8 percent (n=113) of respondents were male compared to 37.2 percent (n=67) female. 88.9 percent (n = 160) were in the age range of 18-39 years, while 11.1 percent (n = 20) were aged from 40-59 years. This indicates that young travellers are actually eager to experience and learn new things as opposed to the older generation. This was further strengthened when 68.3 percent (n = 123) were single as opposed to 26.1 percent (n = 47) married and 5.6 percent (n = 10) among others. More than half of the total respondents (57.2 percent, n = 103) possessed postgraduate degrees compared to 29.4 percent (n = 53) with undergraduate degrees and just 13.3 percent (n = 24) obtained only a secondary school certificate. Parallel to educational levels, 74.4 percent (n = 134) were professional or businessman, 14.4 percent (n = 26) were semi-skilled professionals and 11.1 percent (n = 20) were in administrative or clerical positions.

The international tourists were the Italians who accounted for 20 percent (n = 36), 17.0 percent (n = 31) American and Dutch. 16.1 percent (n = 29) Iranian, 6.1 percent (n = 11) Polish, 5 percent (n = 9) South Korean, 4.4 percent (n = 8)

Spanish and Slovenian, 3.3 percent (n = 6) French and Austrian and 2.8 percent (n = 5) were Swiss. 45 percent (n = 81) of them spent around 4-6 nights, 2.2 percent (n = 4) 7-9 nights, 18.9 percent (n = 34) 3 nights and 33.9 percent (n = 61) more than 10 nights with 84.4 percent (n = 152) for the purpose of holiday/pleasure, followed by 12.3 percent (n = 22) for business matters and 3.3 percent (n = 6) visited only for food and culture. 87.2 percent (n = 157) were visiting Malaysia for the first time, 7.2 percent (n = 13) had visited more than three times and 5.6 percent (n = 10) were visiting for the second time.

A. Ramadan Bazaar Attributes

The underlying relationships between items in each stipulated dimension were statistically tested with exploratory factor analysis as most of the items used were newly developed. Using Principal Component Analysis with varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalization on the 48 items with factor loading of 0.30, six factors were extracted with three items deleted. The six factors were Events Attributes (EVNT, 7 items), Food and Beverages (F&B, 7 items), Cultural Attributes (CULT, 7 items), Experience Level (EXP, 6 items), Satisfaction Level (SATIS, 8 items) and Disseminating Information Behavior (DISINFO, 6 items). The subsequent section looks at the Ramadan bazaar attributes from the perspectives of event, food and beverage and culture.

Through descriptive statistics, the majority of respondents agreed that the Ramadan bazaar provided some eventful aspects which suited their interests. The bazaar as an event offered them the chance to learn more about Malaysian traditional food ($M = 4.11$, item 1), food events ($M = 4.00$, item 2) with a unique atmosphere ($M = 3.94$, item 3). The international tourists agreed that the Ramadan bazaar creates an opportunity for them to understand Malay food events more deeply ($M = 3.91$, item 4) by experiencing the hawker stall concept ($M = 3.66$, item 5) and creates a chance to interact and socialize with local people in the event ($M = 3.47$, item 6). This is not surprising as the majority of them also agreed that the bazaar as an event acts as a melting pot, which attracted them to experience it ($M = 3.41$, item 7). This clearly manifests that, besides other products, the Ramadan bazaar is able to attract international tourists.

TABLE I
 OVERALL MEAN SCORE ON EVENT ATTRIBUTES

	N	Mean	SD
Event	180	3.78	.455

With regard to food and beverage attributes, most of the respondents visited the bazaar with the intention of understanding the different types of food offered ($M = 4.43$, item 1), to taste or to experience the varieties of typical Malaysian food and beverages ($M = 4.23$, item 2) and to enhance their food knowledge ($M = 4.19$, item 3). In addition, the intent was also to learn special and typical local cuisines ($M = 3.87$, item 4), to see the way some of the foods were being prepared ($M = 3.74$, item 5), to learn locals' cooking styles and techniques ($M = 3.71$, item 6) and to see the

presentation of the food at the bazaar ($M = 3.69$, item 7). What could be said from the overall mean scores is that food and beverages become the factor which most attracts the international tourists to visit the Ramadan bazaar.

TABLE II
 OVERALL MEAN SCORE ON FOOD ATTRIBUTES

	N	Mean	SD
Food	180	4.00	.390

Looking at the Ramadan bazaar from the cultural perspective, the majority of the international tourists perceived that Malaysia is rich in food culture ($M = 4.08$, item 1), as the bazaar truly portrays Malaysian food culture ($M = 3.99$, item 2) and agreed that the decision they made to visit the bazaar was to learn more about local food culture ($M = 4.13$, item 3), to experience and learn how the local peoples of different ethnic groups enjoy themselves at the bazaar ($M = 3.84$, item 4) and therefore increase their knowledge of the Malaysian lifestyle ($M = 3.75$, item 5). The international tourists also agreed that the Ramadan bazaar provides a chance for them to see traditional equipment used in preparing the food ($M = 3.69$, item 6) and understand the hospitality and culture of the local people ($M = 3.57$, item 7). This result portrays that the Ramadan bazaar also acts as a typical cultural event that pulls the international tourists, not only to experience the local food, but to understand the culture of it.

TABLE III
 OVERALL MEAN SCORE ON CULTURAL ATTRIBUTES

	N	Mean	SD
Cultural	180	3.74	.564

B. International Tourists' Attraction

A descriptive statistic was again used in measuring the international tourists' experiences and their level of satisfaction with the Ramadan bazaar.

From the items used, the majority of the international tourists agreed that the Ramadan bazaar gave them an opportunity to experience varieties of Malaysian authentic food ($M = 4.34$, item 1) and they were enjoying learning about and tasting food ($M = 4.24$, item 2). The Ramadan bazaar created a sense of discovery ($M = 4.21$, item 3) as most of the food and beverages stimulated their appetite ($M = 4.04$, item 4) with pleasant smells ($M = 3.78$, item 6) and they therefore enjoyed their experiences at the bazaar ($M = 4.05$, item 5).

TABLE IV
 OVERALL MEAN SCORE ON EXPERIENCES AT THE BAZAAR

	N	Mean	SD
Experience	180	3.78	.455

Another related attribute examined was the international tourists' level of satisfaction with the Ramadan bazaar. Results revealed that they were satisfied with the taste of the food and beverages experienced in the bazaar ($M = 3.92$, item 1), satisfied with overall scenario of the bazaar ($M = 3.88$, item 3), the food culture portrayed ($M = 3.89$, item 2) and the food

knowledge gained from there ($M = 3.83$, item 4). Their levels of satisfaction were also expressed on the items:

- i. Visiting Malaysia during Ramadan month ($M = 3.81$, item 5).
- ii. The overall environment of the bazaar ($M = 3.76$, item 6),
- iii. Malaysian hospitality and culture experienced portrayed at the bazaar ($M = 3.68$, item 7)
- iv. Presentation of the food and beverages at the bazaar ($M = 3.61$, item 8).

TABLE V
OVERALL MEAN SCORE ON SATISFACTION

	N	Mean	S.D
Satisfaction	180	3.79	.484

C. Disseminating Information (DISINFO)

On disseminating the information, the majority of them expressed that their good experiences at the bazaar will be shared with their fellow countrymen ($M = 4.31$, item 1), and admitted they will recommend and encourage family and friends and others to visit Malaysia during Ramadan month ($M = 4.09$, item 2). With those feelings, it is not surprising that they were also willing to disseminate information about their experience ($M = 3.88$, item 3), were willing come again to Malaysia during Ramadan month ($M = 3.77$, item 4) and agreed to recommend the bazaar to the travel agencies in their respective countries ($M = 3.58$, item 5)

TABLE VI
OVERALL MEAN SCORE ON DISSEMINATING INFORMATION

	N	Mean	SD
Disseminating information behavior	180	3.88	.552

D. Relationship between the Ramadan Bazaar Attraction for International Tourists disseminating information behavior

The first hypothesis examined the relationship between the predictors comprising the international tourist attraction (experience and satisfaction) and the criterion which represents the disseminating information. The international tourist attraction behavior was able to explain the 20 percent ($R^2 = .20$, F-change = 43.352, $p < .001$) of the examined variance in the disseminating information behavior. The results displayed that the international tourist attraction behavior (experience and satisfaction) significantly contributed to the prediction of the disseminating information. It has been proved that the attraction behavior was significant ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$) as the predictor of the disseminating information behavior. With that, the assumption of the disseminating information behavior with the attraction behavior is also vigorously supported.

TABLE VII

RESULTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' ATTRACTION ON THE DISSEMINATING INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR

Predictors	Model 1 Std. β
Step 1: Model Variables	.44
International Tourists' Attraction Behaviour	
R^2	.20
Adj. R^2	.19
R^2 Change	.20
F-Change	43.352

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

V. IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

From the analyses, the Ramadan bazaar through its attributes (food and beverages, events and culture) attracted a significant number of international tourists to visit and experience such a bazaar. The majority of them perceived the Ramadan bazaar, besides offering varieties of Malaysian authentic dishes, as portraying a very unique food event and food culture, which directly enhanced their knowledge of Malaysian gastronomy. The positive perceptions of the international tourists clearly indicate that the Ramadan bazaar, besides and in addition to the other food events and tourism products, enables the generating and boosting of the local economy. Those individuals (business operators), organizations (travel agencies and non-government organizations) and government authorities (Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Rural Development), which are closely associated with the tourism industry, therefore should not ignore this good sign, but take a proactive stand in promoting this gastronomic event to the international tourists.

Inserting the Ramadan Bazaar in the Malaysia tourism event calendar and the official launching of this bazaar at a different location each year since 2005 is one of the good initiatives undertaken by the government and related authorities and it should continue to be done as a way of attracting international tourists. In line with this, promotion of Malaysian tourism through international travel agencies, websites, blogs and others means could include this bazaar as one of the attractions, besides the main tourism products, for international tourists who intend to visit Malaysia during fasting month. It appears that the international tourists who visited Malaysia and experienced the bazaar were among the young and first time visitors. It becomes normal for any new tourists when travelling to foreign destinations to have high expectations not only of the country's main tourism products, but also of the food and beverages. As young travellers are actually more eager to experience and learn new things as opposed to the older generation, the current promotional efforts should attract more intention among the young travellers.

The results of this study also revealed that the experiences and high level of satisfaction of the international visitors with Malaysian Ramadan bazaar attributes (food, beverages, events and culture) positively influenced their willingness to disseminate and share information with their country mates, family and friends. The authorities that are responsible for

managing the bazaar therefore should enforce the necessary regulations for food operators, such as maintaining cleanliness, greetings, kindness and politeness, not only toward the locals but the international tourists as well. Emphasizing and practising these manners will at least create optimistic dissemination information behaviour or word of mouth (WOM) among the international tourists, thus encouraging repeat and new visitors. As claimed by many scholars, satisfaction will lead to intention to revisit and dissemination of information.

Of all the findings learnt from this study, the most remarkable is that the connotation of fasting month inhibiting the international tourist arrivals and restricting their tourism activities in Muslim countries, as accused by some people, is totally baseless. In actual fact, the fasting month not only allows non-Muslim international tourists in particular to explore the country as usual, but at the same time creates the opportunity for them to experience unique food events like the Bazaar Ramadan which only occurs once a year. As a conclusion and not to exaggerate, many events in this beautiful country can be taken advantage of as tourism products, including the Ramadan bazaar as long as they are done in a proper manner with the collaboration and cooperation of the government related authorities and stakeholders.

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