



THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL MARKETING AND NETWORKING ON SCHOOL CHOICE DECISIONS MEDIATED BY SCHOOL REPUTATION : A STUDY AT DARUSSALAM 2 ISLAMIC EDUCATION FOUNDATION VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, CERME

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ABSTRACT

The increasing competition among private vocational schools requires educational institutions to implement effective marketing strategies to attract prospective students. Despite having extensive industry partnerships and active digital marketing initiatives, SMK YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme experienced a decline in student enrollment during the 2025/2026 academic year. This phenomenon indicates the need to examine the factors influencing school selection decisions. This study aims to analyze the effects of Digital Marketing and Networking on School Selection Decisions, with School Reputation serving as a mediating variable. The research was conducted at SMK YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme, a private vocational high school in Gresik, East Java, Indonesia. Digital Marketing refers to the utilization of digital platforms such as social media, websites, and online communication channels to promote school programs and services. Networking represents the school's collaborative relationships with business and industrial sectors, while School Reputation reflects public perceptions regarding the institution's quality, credibility, and achievements. This study employs a quantitative approach to examine both direct and indirect relationships among the variables. The findings are

expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the role of Digital Marketing and Networking in enhancing School Reputation and influencing prospective students' school selection decisions. Furthermore, the results are anticipated to contribute to the development of educational marketing strategies, particularly for vocational schools seeking to strengthen their competitiveness and sustainability in the increasingly dynamic educational environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing competition among educational institutions requires schools to implement effective marketing strategies to attract prospective students. Sartika and Putriku (2025) found that digital marketing significantly influences school selection decisions by providing accessible and attractive information through digital platforms. In vocational education, networking with business and industrial sectors also plays an important role in improving educational quality and institutional competitiveness (Cahyadi et al., 2025). School reputation is another important factor influencing educational choices. Zakiati et al. (2025) reported that school reputation significantly affects parents' preferences when selecting

educational institutions because it reflects educational quality, credibility, and institutional achievements. Similarly, Arief and Brabo (2024) found that digital marketing activities can influence students' educational decisions through positive institutional perceptions. Although previous studies have examined Digital Marketing, Networking, and School Reputation, limited research has investigated their integrated effects on School Selection Decisions, particularly in vocational schools. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of Digital Marketing and Networking on School Selection Decisions mediated by School Reputation at SMK YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing refers to the use of digital platforms to promote information and attract target audiences. (Sya'adah, 2024). and (Sihole et al, 2025). found that digital marketing positively influences prospective students' interest and school selection decisions by providing accessible and attractive information.

Networking is a collaborative relationship between schools and external stakeholders, particularly industry partners. (Emilya and Hidayat, 2024). as well as (Hadi et al,2025). reported that school–industry partnerships improve educational quality, institutional credibility, and graduate readiness. School reputation reflects stakeholders' perceptions of a school's quality and credibility. (Wahidah et al, 2023). and (Nicholson, 2023). found that a positive school reputation significantly influences parents' and students' preferences when selecting educational institutions. School selection decision is the process of choosing an educational institution based on various considerations. (Krisbiyanto and Nadhifah,2022). and (Ahidin, 2021). found that school image and institutional characteristics significantly influence students' decisions in selecting schools.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach to examine the effects of Digital Marketing and Networking on School Selection Decisions mediated by School Reputation at SMK YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme, Gresik, Indonesia. Data were collected from 100 students using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The study investigated four variables: Digital Marketing, Networking, School Reputation, and School Selection Decision.

The questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. The analysis included measurement model evaluation through validity and reliability tests, followed by structural model evaluation to test the proposed hypotheses and the mediating role of School Reputation.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 FINDING

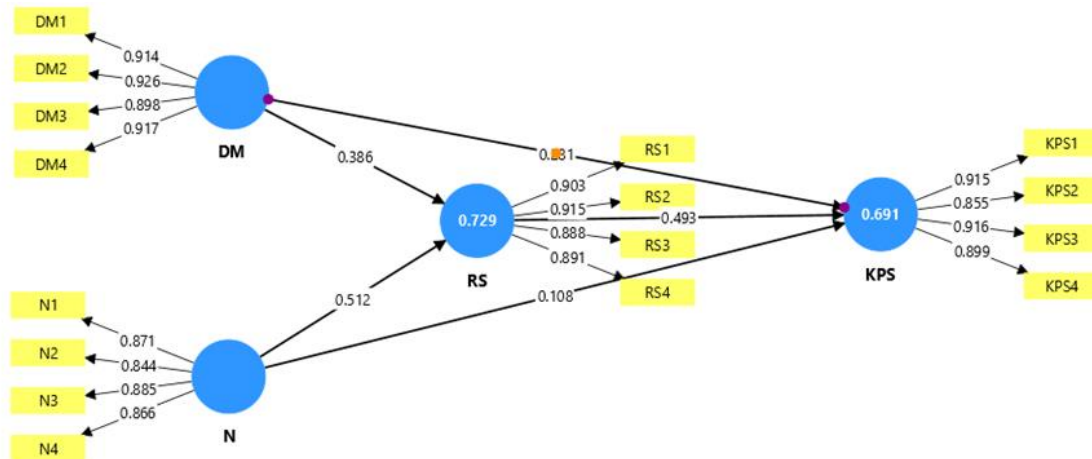


Figure 4.4.1
Conceptual Framework

4.1.1 OUTER MODEL

4.1.1.1 Outer Loading

Table 1 Outer Loading

	DM	SCD	N	SR
DM1	0.914			
DM2	0.926			
DM3	0.898			
DM4	0.917			
SCD1		0.915		
SCD2		0.855		
SCD3		0.916		
SCD4		0.899		
N1			0.871	
N2			0.844	
N3			0.885	
N4			0.866	
SR1				0.903
SR2				0.915
SR3				0.888
SR4				0.891

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

The results of the convergent validity test for the Digital Marketing (DM), Networking (N), School Reputation (SR), and School Selection Decision (SSD) variables using a reflective measurement model indicate that all indicators have loading factor values exceeding 0.700. Therefore, all indicators satisfy the convergent validity criteria as suggested by Ghazali and Latan (2020). Furthermore, the analysis shows that none of the indicators has an outer loading value below 0.50. Consequently, all indicators are considered valid and suitable for further analysis.

4.1.1.2 Cronbach's Alpha Value

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Value

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Digital Marketing (DM)	0.934
School Choice Decisions (SCD)	0.919
Networking (N)	0.889
School Reputation (SR)	0.921

Source: Result of data procesing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, it can be observed that the Cronbach's Alpha value for each research variable exceeds 0.70. These results indicate that all research variables have met the recommended Cronbach's Alpha threshold. Therefore, it can be concluded that all variables demonstrate a high level of reliability and are suitable for further analysis.

4.1.1.3 Composite Reliability

Table 3 Composite Reliability

Variable	Composite Reliability
Digital Marketing (DM)	0.935
School Choice Decisions (SCD)	0.927
Networking (N)	0.890
School Reputation (SR)	0.922

Source: Result of data procesing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, the Composite Reliability values of all research variables are greater than 0.70. According to Ghozali and Latan (2020), a construct is considered reliable when its Composite Reliability value exceeds 0.70. The results indicate that all variables have satisfied the Composite Reliability criterion. Therefore, it can be concluded that all research variables exhibit a high level of reliability and are suitable for subsequent analysis.

4.1.1.4 Average Variant Extracted (AVE) Value

Table 4 Average Variant Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Average Variant Extracted (AVE)
Digital Marketing (DM)	0.835
School Choice Decisions (SCD)	0.804
Networking (N)	0.751
School Reputation (SR)	0.809

Source: Result of data procesing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, it can be seen that all research variables have Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50. According to Ghozali and Latan (2020), an AVE value exceeding 0.50 indicates adequate convergent validity. Therefore, all variables have met the recommended AVE criterion and can be considered valid for measuring their respective constructs. Consequently, the research model is appropriate for further analysis.

4.1.1.5 Croos Loadings Discriminant Validity

Table 5 Croos Loadings Discriminant Validity

	DM	SCD	N	SR
DM1	0.914	0.731	0.695	0.718
DM2	0.926	0.680	0.696	0.718
DM3	0.898	0.659	0.757	0.700
DM4	0.917	0.708	0.782	0.776



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SCD1	0.728	0.915	0.712	0.795
SCD2	0.587	0.855	0.559	0.605
SCD3	0.711	0.916	0.703	0.758
SCD4	0.687	0.899	0.658	0.711
N1	0.718	0.643	0.871	0.701
N2	0.744	0.654	0.844	0.733
N3	0.690	0.676	0.885	0.703
N4	0.622	0.582	0.866	0.710
SR1	0.738	0.733	0.814	0.903
SR2	0.703	0.678	0.714	0.915
SR3	0.724	0.724	0.692	0.888
SR4	0.700	0.760	0.730	0.891

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, it can be observed that each indicator has the highest Cross Loading value on its respective construct compared to the Cross Loading values on other constructs. This result indicates that each indicator is more strongly associated with the variable it is intended to measure than with other variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that all indicators used in this study have met the Discriminant Validity criteria through the Cross Loadings assessment and are capable of adequately distinguishing their respective constructs.

4.1.1.6 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Table 6 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	DM	SCD	N	SR
DM	0.914			
SCD	0.761	0.897		
N	0.802	0.738	0.866	
SR	0.797	0.806	0.822	0.899

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, the Fornell–Larcker Criterion results indicate that the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs. Specifically, the Digital Marketing variable has a value of 0.914, School Selection Decision has a value of 0.897, Networking has a value of 0.866, and School Reputation has a value of 0.899. Since each value exceeds the correlations with other constructs, all variables have met the discriminant validity requirement. Therefore, it can be concluded that all constructs in this study are valid and capable of adequately distinguishing themselves from other constructs in the research model.

4.1.2 INNER MODEL

4.1.2.1 Collinearity Statistics (VIF)

Table 7 Collinearity Statistics

	VIF
DM1	3.479
DM2	4.032
DM3	3.150
DM4	3.604
SCD1	3.709
SCD2	2.604
SCD3	3.872
SCD4	3.196
N1	2.503
N2	2.069

	VIF
N3	2.636
N4	2.392
SR1	3.034
SR2	3.665
SR3	2.934
SR4	2.966

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values of several indicators show different levels of collinearity. A total of nine indicators fall into the category of potential collinearity concerns, while seven indicators are categorized as having no collinearity issues. However, all VIF values are below the recommended threshold of 5.00, indicating that there are no critical multicollinearity problems among the indicators. Therefore, all indicators used in this study are acceptable and suitable for further analysis.

4.1.2.2 T-Statistics dan P-Values, Direct Effects

Table 8 T-Statistics dan P-Values, Direct Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
DM -> SCD	0.281	0.281	0.136	2.063	0.039
DM -> SR	0.386	0.372	0.121	3.181	0.001
N -> SCD	0.108	0.112	0.171	0.630	0.529
N -> SR	0.512	0.526	0.120	4.284	0.000
SR -> SCD	0.493	0.486	0.204	2.416	0.016

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, the hypothesis testing results can be summarized as follows. Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on School Selection Decision, with an original sample value of 0.281, a t-statistic of 2.063, and a p-value of 0.039. Since the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, H1 is accepted. In contrast, Networking does not have a significant effect on School Selection Decision, as indicated by an original sample value of 0.108, a t-statistic of 0.630, and a p-value of 0.529. Therefore, H2 is rejected.

Furthermore, Networking has a positive and significant effect on School Reputation, with an original sample value of 0.512, a t-statistic of 4.284, and a p-value of 0.000. Thus, H3 is accepted. Similarly, Digital Marketing positively and significantly influences School Reputation, as evidenced by an original sample value of 0.386, a t-statistic of 3.181, and a p-value of 0.001, leading to the acceptance of H4. In addition, School Reputation has a positive and significant effect on School Selection Decision, with an original sample value of 0.493, a t-statistic of 2.416, and a p-value of 0.016. Therefore, H5 is also accepted.

Overall, the findings indicate that Digital Marketing and School Reputation significantly influence School Selection Decision, while Networking significantly affects School Reputation but does not directly affect School Selection Decision.

4.1.2.3 T-Statistics dan P-Values, Indirect Effects

Table 9 T-Statistics dan P-Values, Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
DM -> SR -> SCD	0.190	0.188	0.109	1.753	0.080



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	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
N -> SR -> SCD	0.252	0.250	0.112	2.243	0.025

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

The mediation analysis results indicate that Digital Marketing does not have a significant indirect effect on School Selection Decision through School Reputation. The indirect effect shows an original sample value of 0.190, a t-statistic of 1.753, and a p-value of 0.080. Since the p-value exceeds 0.05 and the t-statistic is lower than 1.96, H6 is rejected. These findings suggest that School Reputation does not significantly mediate the relationship between Digital Marketing and School Selection Decision.

In contrast, Networking has a significant indirect effect on School Selection Decision through School Reputation. The indirect effect has an original sample value of 0.252, a t-statistic of 2.243, and a p-value of 0.025. Since the p-value is below 0.05 and the t-statistic exceeds 1.96, H7 is accepted. These results indicate that School Reputation significantly mediates the relationship between Networking and School Selection Decision.

Furthermore, the mediation analysis reveals different mediation categories for the two independent variables. The relationship between Digital Marketing and School Selection Decision through School Reputation is classified as having no mediation effect, as both the direct and indirect effects are not significant. This finding implies that the presence of School Reputation does not strengthen or alter the influence of Digital Marketing on School Selection Decision. On the other hand, the relationship between Networking and School Selection Decision through School Reputation is categorized as perfect mediation. Although the direct effect of Networking on School Selection Decision is not significant, the indirect effect through School Reputation is significant. This result indicates that improvements in Networking contribute to enhancing School Reputation, which subsequently influences School Selection Decision.

4.1.3 EVALUATION OF GOODNESS AND MODEL FIT

4.1.3.1 R-Square Value

Table 10 R-Square Value

Variable	R-square
School Choice Decisions	0.681
School Reputation	0.724

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, the R-square value for the School Selection Decision (SSD) variable is 0.681. This result indicates that 68.1% of the variance in School Selection Decision can be explained by the variables included in the research model, while the remaining 31.9% is influenced by other factors outside the model. Furthermore, the R-square value for the School Reputation (SR) variable is 0.724, indicating that 72.4% of the variance in School Reputation can be explained by the independent variables in the model, whereas the remaining 27.6% is explained by factors not examined in this study. These findings suggest that the proposed model has substantial explanatory power in predicting both School Reputation and School Selection Decision.

4.1.3.2 Goodness Of Fit

Table 11 Goodnes Of Fit

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.052	0.053
d _{ULS}	0.369	0.389
d _G	0.411	0.411

NFI	0.863	0.863
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Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the data presented above, the SRMR values are 0.052 and 0.053, which indicate a good model fit because they are below the recommended threshold of 0.08. Furthermore, the d_ULS values are 0.369 and 0.389, while the d_G value is 0.411. The NFI values are 0.863 for both the saturated and estimated models. Overall, these results indicate that the model demonstrates an acceptable level of goodness-of-fit and is suitable for evaluating the relationships among the research variables.

4.1.3.3 PLSpredict

Table 12 PLSpredict

	Q ² predict	PLS- SEM_RMSE	PLS- SEM_MAE	LM_ RMSE	LM_MAE	IA_RMSE	IA_MAE
SR1	0.657	0.341	0.246	0.359	0.257	0.583	0.439
SR2	0.536	0.411	0.290	0.453	0.311	0.604	0.484
SR3	0.524	0.361	0.281	0.371	0.288	0.523	0.405
SR4	0.545	0.362	0.288	0.391	0.308	0.536	0.447
SCD1	0.548	0.408	0.297	0.441	0.313	0.607	0.453
SCD2	0.330	0.489	0.355	0.537	0.399	0.597	0.467
SCD3	0.527	0.418	0.314	0.439	0.318	0.607	0.478
SCD4	0.479	0.393	0.299	0.415	0.311	0.545	0.456

Source: Result of data processing SmartPLS Report 2025

Based on the table above, the RMSE and MAE values for the School Reputation and School Selection Decision indicators are relatively low. These results indicate that the prediction errors of the model are minimal, demonstrating a satisfactory level of predictive accuracy. Therefore, the model for both constructs can be considered adequate and capable of providing reliable predictions for the observed data.

4.2 DISCUSSION

4.2.1 H1 : Digital Marketing and School Choice Decision

The results indicate that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on School Choice Decision. The path coefficient value is 0.281, with a t-statistic of 2.063 and a p-value of 0.039. Since the t-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the p-value is below 0.05, H1 is accepted. This finding suggests that effective digital marketing activities through social media, websites, and other digital platforms can influence prospective students' decisions in selecting a vocational school. The result supports the view that digital communication channels play an important role in providing information and shaping perceptions regarding educational institutions.

4.2.2 H2 : Networking and School Choice Decision

The analysis shows that Networking does not have a significant effect on School Choice Decision. The path coefficient is 0.108, with a t-statistic of 0.630 and a p-value of 0.529. Since the t-statistic is lower than 1.96 and the p-value exceeds 0.05, H2 is rejected. This result indicates that networking activities alone are insufficient to directly influence students' decisions in choosing a school. Prospective students may not immediately perceive the benefits of school partnerships unless these collaborations contribute to a stronger institutional reputation.

4.2.3 H3 : Networking and School Reputation

The findings reveal that Networking has a positive and significant effect on School Reputation. The path coefficient is 0.512, with a t-statistic of 4.284 and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H3 is accepted. This result demonstrates that collaboration with business and industrial sectors, internship



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opportunities, and external partnerships contribute significantly to enhancing the school's reputation. Strong networking activities improve public trust and strengthen the image of vocational schools as institutions capable of preparing students for future careers.

4.2.4 H4 : Digital Marketing and School Reputation

Digital Marketing was found to have a positive and significant effect on School Reputation. The path coefficient value is 0.386, with a t-statistic of 3.181 and a p-value of 0.001. Consequently, H4 is accepted. The finding indicates that effective digital marketing strategies enhance stakeholders' perceptions of school quality, credibility, and achievements. Through consistent and informative digital communication, schools can strengthen their reputation and increase public confidence.

4.2.5 H5 : School Reputation and School Choice Decision

The results show that School Reputation has a positive and significant effect on School Choice Decision. The path coefficient is 0.493, with a t-statistic of 2.416 and a p-value of 0.016. Therefore, H5 is accepted. This finding suggests that a positive reputation encourages prospective students and parents to choose a particular educational institution. Schools with strong reputations are perceived as more trustworthy and capable of providing quality education and better future opportunities.

4.2.6 H6 : The Mediating Role of School Reputation in the Relationship between Digital Marketing and School Choice Decision

The mediation analysis indicates that School Reputation does not significantly mediate the relationship between Digital Marketing and School Choice Decision. The indirect effect shows a path coefficient of 0.190, a t-statistic of 1.753, and a p-value of 0.080. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, H6 is rejected. This result implies that although Digital Marketing significantly influences School Reputation, the indirect effect through School Reputation is not strong enough to influence School Choice Decision. Therefore, Digital Marketing primarily affects school choice through its direct impact rather than through reputational mechanisms.

4.2.7 H7 : The Mediating Role of School Reputation in the Relationship between Networking and School Choice Decision

The results reveal that School Reputation significantly mediates the relationship between Networking and School Choice Decision. The indirect effect has a path coefficient of 0.252, a t-statistic of 2.243, and a p-value of 0.025. Therefore, H7 is accepted. This finding indicates that networking activities enhance School Reputation, which subsequently influences students' decisions in selecting a school. The result highlights the strategic importance of school-industry partnerships in strengthening institutional reputation and attracting prospective students.

5. CONCLUSION DAN IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of Digital Marketing and Networking on School Selection Decisions mediated by School Reputation at SMK YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme. The findings indicate that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on both School Selection Decision and School Reputation, while Networking significantly influences School Reputation but does not directly affect School Selection Decision. Furthermore, School Reputation has a significant positive effect on School Selection Decision. The mediation analysis revealed that School Reputation does not mediate the relationship between Digital Marketing and School Selection Decision, but significantly mediates the relationship between Networking and School Selection Decision. These results emphasize the importance of digital marketing strategies and institutional reputation in influencing prospective students' school selection decisions.



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5.2 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the educational marketing literature by extending the understanding of how Digital Marketing, Networking, and School Reputation influence School Selection Decisions in the context of vocational education. The findings support the view that School Reputation serves as a strategic intangible asset that directly affects school choice and acts as a mediating mechanism between Networking and School Selection Decision. However, the absence of a significant mediating effect of School Reputation on the relationship between Digital Marketing and School Selection Decision suggests that digital marketing may exert a more direct influence on stakeholders' decision-making processes.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings provide practical insights for vocational school administrators in developing effective student recruitment strategies. Schools should strengthen their digital marketing activities through engaging social media content, interactive communication, and consistent online promotion to increase visibility and attract prospective students. In addition, schools should expand partnerships with business and industrial sectors through internships, training programs, and professional certifications, as these collaborations enhance institutional reputation and indirectly influence school selection decisions.

5.4 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted at a single vocational school, namely SMK YPI Darussalam 2 Cerme, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational institutions. Second, the study focused only on four variables—Digital Marketing, Networking, School Reputation, and School Selection Decision—while other factors that may influence school choice, such as school facilities, tuition fees, educational quality, and geographical location, were not included in the research model.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies are encouraged to investigate additional factors that may influence School Selection Decisions, such as school facilities, educational quality, tuition costs, parental influence, and school location. Researchers may also expand the scope of the study by involving multiple schools and different educational levels to improve the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, employing mixed-method or longitudinal research designs could provide deeper insights into how marketing strategies and institutional reputation influence educational decision-making over time.

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