

## **FILIPINO SEAFARERS' USE OF FACEBOOK TO COPE WITH HOMESICKNESS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Nowadays, technology is one of the factors that helps OFWs all around the globe. Using applications like Facebook helps them to relieve their stress by using different features of the application. Through Facebook, seafarers may communicate with their families and friends despite the physical distance. This study aimed to determine the Filipino seafarers' use of Facebook to cope with homesickness. The researchers used random sampling to obtain the required information. The researchers surveyed Magsaysay Training Center seafarers who have years of experience working on board. Before the actual survey, the researchers pre-tested the questionnaire for thirty seafarers who also have years of experience. Then, the researchers conducted a survey among eighty-five respondents in the said training center in Ermita, Manila. The researchers found out that most of the respondents connect with their families from 1-2 hours only since most of them were trained being away from their families because of their long years of service on board. Their main purposes of the Filipino seafarers' use of Facebook is for entertainment and communication. Messenger is the most used feature of Facebook. The main use of Facebook among Filipino seafarers is to cope with homesickness and entertainment. Some of the respondents also use Facebook for social interaction. By using Facebook, they maintain their relationship with their families, even if they are far from each other.*

**Keywords:** *OFW, seafarers, cruise line industry, homesickness, Facebook, communication, entertainment, social interaction.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Millions of Filipinos provide a living for their family by working internationally or going abroad. They are known as the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). The OFW phenomenon began in the early 1980's, when the government created laws which promoted and regulated the employment of Filipinos overseas.

As written by Megacities in 2015, OFWs count as “national heroes”, not only because they contribute to the country's economic growth and gross domestic product but also because they sacrifice living far away from their loved ones in order to help secure their families financially. They send a part of their earnings to their families in order to support them in establishing small businesses or invest in houses.

Given that many Filipinos are engaged in working abroad and one of the progressing industries nowadays was the cruise line industry, Filipinos became active seafarers. They are considered as the leading supplier of maritime power, according to Samante (2017) and have become widely known in the industry. Depasupil of Manila Times (2016) stated that there are around 229,000 Filipinos on board merchant shipping vessels around the world, making them the “single biggest nationality bloc” in the global shipping industry. In the year 2016, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) reported that Filipino seafarers comprises more than 25 percent of the 1.5 million mariners worldwide and were recognized as most preferred workers in the world because they are well-trained and proficient in English.

Due to the continuous increase in population, a bill which focuses on defining Filipino seafarers' employment and social rights was approved. (Pimentel, 2017) The House Bill (HB) No. 5685 or “Instituting the Magna Carta of Filipino Seafarers” states that Filipino seafarers shall be provided with medical assistance and other kinds of health and social protection. This is the reason why Filipinos are comfortable enough to get a job from a cruise ship. In relation to that, Andress (2016) said that Filipinos were also interested in the industry because the salary they get in the cruise is twice or thrice of land-based

worked in the country and they got to travel for free while doing their job.

The growing industry of cruise line in the Philippines prompted the Department of Tourism (DOT) to head out a cruise tourism plan. In her article entitled 'DOT Rolls out Comprehensive Plan for Cruise Tourism', Simeon (2016) of The Philippine Star reported DOT's plans to build new cruise facilities in Manila due to its superior cruise port and terminal. Bengzon (2016) said that this improvement can provide many opportunities to Filipinos because the country has more than 7,000 islands that has largely been undiscovered.

Seafarers have a tough job. Being away from their family and working on board vessels sailing non-stop for weeks or months make them prone to mental and emotional stress. The nature of their work expose them to homesickness just like any other OFW. However, the Internet provided a key to help them cope with homesickness- social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook.

Nowadays, many Filipino families depend on technology for communication. Through the use of the internet, nothing seems to be impossible. The occurrence of the Social Networking Sites (SNS) made communication more accessible for everyone. Among these Social Networking Sites, Facebook remains as the largest and most utilized.

Facebook is considered as the leading social network that has attracted millions of users across countries, with a total number of monthly active users of 128 billion, according to Lunden (2014). This is because Facebook permits individuals to connect and communicate with others despite the distance. It is also a medium that is accessible for most people.

However, the motivations for using Facebook differ in each country. This study aims to examine the motivation of Filipino Facebook users in accessing the site and the impact of their usage to their social capital and satisfaction.

Facebook is a social media site which allows its users to create a profile containing basic information about them. Users are also allowed to add friends or follow celebrities. One can also update his/her

status; send message to different people; share links and upload photos or videos. Commenting or liking posted status or pictures is also possible.

According to Ochoa (2011) who studied Facebook as a tool in relationship maintenance between OFW families, results showed that various features of Facebook such as tagging/sharing of pictures and videos, chat, posting on the wall and creating groups helped the respondents in communicating with their loved ones abroad. With this, the social networking site provides an invaluable resource for fulfilling a basic human need for social connection rather than enhancing well-being. Some researchers said that Facebook had positive effects on its users. They found out that people spend more time on Facebook when they are feeling lonely.

Everyone experiences homesickness, no matter how old or young you are. When it comes to homesickness, there are harmful comments that are related with it. Scharp (2015) in his study, discussed the things that an individual cares about their homes; how important home is to them and how a person copes up when they are in a state of homesickness. The result of his analysis from 34 interviewees indicated that there are about 12 different things that an individual miss about his or her home. Places, activities, family and feelings are among the most relevant things that an individual think when he/she is in state of homesickness. Moreover, the word “home” meant being in a location which is relaxed and harmless. Seeking social support when they are being homesick have not been an option among the majority of the participants, and those who asked for support have done it directly and indirectly at the same time.

Another research about migration studied a person’s emotions when moving. In doing so, Morse and Mudgett (2017) a geographer and a historian stated that historians also started pondering about how people miss even the ordinary sceneries. Nonetheless, people usually miss their family and the usual places they have been to when they suffer from homesickness. The research reflects the environmental homesickness by the immigrants. In a recent migration survey, drawings on an archival material have been found out. Among the observed variables in the research are the emotions that are felt by one

person when he or she is moving away from home and the way a person cope up by trying to keep on having a connection to their homes. Natural environment has been suggested to be included in the growing theory.

Moving away from home can cause homesickness into us, people. Bardelle and Lashley (2017) said that homesickness is experienced by everyone at some time of their lives. Working on a cruise line- an industry where you work in an enclosed space and setting- can trigger and intensify a person's feeling of being homesick. Their study focuses on the strong sensitivity of crew members because of every country's different tradition than their usual workplace. Their findings advised that most of the time, a massive number of crew members experience homesickness, an extensive percent feels homesick frequently or always. Customer service experiences can also be affected by the crew who suffers from homesickness that's why it is important for both the shipboard company and the cruise line management.

Separation from home and finding a new place to be understood in different aspects. Hence, they concluded that being homesick is a "mini-grief," where it involves having different stressors of being in new places. And homesickness must be hardly known and separated from examinations of home – where correlates, and consequences are mandatory because of new place stressors. That's why Facebook actually plays a big role to Filipino seafarers' life at sea to cope with their homesickness.

In this study, the researchers aim to provide the students a guide on how the cruise line industry goes in real life. They chose the topic in order to find out the extent of Facebook use in coping up with Filipino seafarers' homesickness in terms of communication, entertainment and social interaction. Moreover, the significance of the study is to determine the use of Facebook to the Filipino seafarers and come up with a conclusion that will enable the readers to fully understand how important Facebook is and to create recommendations for the future researchers who will be interested in conducting related research.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive method of research was used to gather the needed data in considering the Filipino seafarers use of Facebook to cope with homesickness. The researchers have chosen the seafarers under the Magsaysay Training Center with a total of 85 respondents.

In conducting the study, the researcher used self-made survey form or questionnaire as an instrument. As stated by Sincero (2012), having a quantitative research, survey type of questionnaire is the most commonly used nowadays. In fact, it is a systematic method of collecting data from target respondents. This is being used to stimulate ideas and behaviors, preferences, traits, attitudes and facts. The survey questionnaire is composed of questions which contain the demographic profile of the respondents and data needed for evaluation and analysis for the study.

The questionnaire is composed of three parts, Part I is the profile of the respondents in terms of age, sex, marital status, years of service and annual income. Part II is about the extent of the Filipino seafarers' use of Facebook to cope with homesickness. Part III will determine if there is any significant difference in the extent of Filipino seafarers use of Facebook to cope with homesickness when are grouped according to their profile. The survey is created using precise questions that were exclusively formed by the researchers with the guidance of the research adviser, statistician, and grammarian for content validation and to ensure its consistency and validity. Aside from this, the researchers used Cronbach Analysis. The analysis results within the accepted range of 0.90 and above, meaning that the questionnaire is consistent and reliable. The researchers used the result of the analysis to create a basis in order to gather precise statistical data and more reliable conclusion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

In the Table 1 for the Demographic Profile of our respondents, it is shown that the result of age for seafarers mostly working on board. Greater number of seafarers currently working is from ages 20-35 years old. When it comes to sex the majority of the respondents are male, having a total male respondents of 66, and female respondents of 19,

it is safe to say that cruise industry is male dominated. In fact, it is one of those very few industries which has the lowest number of female participation. Blame it on the traditional mind set of the “male dominated” industry or the lack of awareness, the paltry number of female seafarers clearly states that very little has been done to encourage women for taking seafaring careers, according to Social Cultural and Practical Obstacles (2017). This strengthens the result of this study in terms of sex from the demographic profile. The table for marital status clearly exhibits that majority of the respondents are married with a 55% from total percentage who are working on board in the other hand 37 of frequency with 44% is seafarers who are single and second to the group. Lastly, other status completing the total percentage with 1%. In addition to this, table 1 also shows the demographic file of the respondents according to their age, years of service and income. It shows that most of the respondents’ age that ranges from 20 to 63 has a mean of 35. The table also shows the years of service of the respondents that ranges from 1 – 39 years with a minimum income of Php 60,000 and maximum of Php 4, 500,000 per year.

Moreover, according to Morello (2018) the salaries of seafarers ranges from around \$800 (₱41,000) per month up to \$8,000 depends on position or job status and job department. Furthermore, The Joint Maritime Commission (2014) decided to cooperate about the minimum basic monthly salary for seafarers. As of January 1, 2015, from \$585 (₱30,000) to \$592 and in January 1, 2016 is became US\$614 (₱32,000). The Maritime Employer councils, agreed to the International Shipping Federation (ISF), encountered with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) for the suggested minimum wage for the seafarers.

**Table 1. Frequency distribution demographic profile of the respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
	<b>= 85</b>	<b>= 100%</b>
Male	66	78
Female	19	22

  

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
	<b>= 85</b>	<b>= 100%</b>
Single	37	44
Married	47	55
Others	1	1

  

<b>Profile</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Age	20	63	35	9
Service	1	39	10	9
Income	60,000	4,500,000	703,818	623,443

Table 2 shows the respondents' evaluation in terms of Communication. "Statement 1 - Through Facebook I can speak with my loved ones." received a weighted mean of 3.59. This shows that the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook helps bridging gap on seafarers and families through communication. While the statement, "Frequency of interaction with friends, has positive benefits on respondents' self-esteem." has the lowest weighted mean in evaluation in terms of communication with the weighted mean of 3.34, which shows that most of the respondents rarely use Facebook to communicate with their friends to help them boost their self-esteem. It is safe to say that most of them depend on their family through communication which benefits them in their self esteem.

This result can be supported by the study of Ochoa (2011) wherein he mentioned that the respondents shared to their loved ones and families to update them despite physical distance and it has something to do in bridging gap between families. In fact, according to Ellison and Steinfield, (2007) that Facebook features may be helpful for individuals looking for some form of support, such as advice about big

decision for themselves. They also stated that the respondents appreciate and are satisfied with their work as long as there is a way to communicate with their family and friends. This is one of the greatest roles of communication in regard to the seafaring profession to cope with their homesickness. Social networking sites like Facebook have made it much easier for seafaring personnel to communicate with friends and family. Like Baym, the current study found that with so many people having busy lives or having friends and family that live far away, these sites have helped to maintain contact with those individuals that seafaring personnel rarely saw.

**Table 2. The mean deviation of coping with homesickness in terms of communication**

<b>Communication</b>	<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
Through Facebook he can speak with my loved ones.	3.59	Strongly Agree
Most of the seafarers are using Messenger on Facebook to communicate with other people.	3.54	Strongly Agree
	3.53	Strongly Agree
Facebook can bridge the gap between him and his family.	3.52	Strongly Agree
He can sustain his relationship with his family through Facebook.	3.47	Agree
Seafarers depend on Facebook in communicating.	3.45	Agree
	3.41	Agree
Facebook is accessible for everyone in the cruise ship.	3.41	Agree
He always keeps in touch or connected and freely express what he want to say and make him feel closer with his parents.	3.34	Agree
Frequency of interaction with friends, has positive benefits on respondents' self-esteem.	3.48	Agree
<b>Composite mean</b>		

1.00-1.49 Not Relevant at all, 1.50-2.49 Slightly Relevant, 2.50-3.49 Moderately Relevant, 3.50-4.00 Very Relevant

Table 3 shows the respondents’ evaluation in terms of Entertainment “Statement 1 – he use facebook to get updates in current news.” received the highest weighted mean of 3.53. This shows that the respondents strongly agreed that Facebook helps them to be updated in the current happenings in globally. Since most of the respondents are pioneer and longstanding on board. “Statement 1 – Facebook gives him the ability to showcase his talent and skills.” has the lowest weighted mean in evaluation in terms of communication with the weighted mean of 3.21. It shows that some of the Filipino seafarers are not fan of showcasing their talents through facebook.

This result can be supported by the study of Alicia Sparks (2012) wherein, as people who read up on news or keep up with entertainment media, that probably well aware of the humor waiting around every corner. It shows that entertainment also plays a big role to cope with homesickness by making the reader's mind healthy and happy.

**Table 3. The mean deviation of coping with homesickness in terms of entertainment**

Indicators	Weighted mean	Verbal Interpretation
He use Facebook to get updated in current news.	3.53	Strongly Agree
Facebook helps him to be updated in his favorite teams in a sport.	3.44	Agree
The application Facebook seeks self-information about a certain thing for him to be entertained.	3.40	Agree
Facebook is helpful for seafarer looking for some forms of support, such as advice about big decision.	3.39	Agree
He can share his recent photos and videos on Facebook.	3.38	Agree
Facebook offers application like chat rooms, gaming and email exchange.	3.38	Agree
Facebook allows him to play different games during his spare time.	3.29	Agree
Facebook gives him the ability to showcase his talent and skills	3.21	Agree
<b>Composite mean</b>	<b>3.38</b>	<b>Agree</b>

1.00-1.49 Not Relevant at all, 1.50-2.49 Slightly Relevant, 2.50-3.49 Moderately Relevant, 3.50-4.00 Very Relevant

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents strongly agreed that they used Facebook to interact with people they already know or to meet new people. This applies that it is truly helpful for seafarers to use Facebook in terms of social interaction.

The verbal interpretation was alike from the study of Ochoa (2011) who stated that Facebook as a tool in relationship maintenance between OFW families shows different features that helped the respondents in interacting with their loved ones like tagging/sharing of pictures and videos, chat, posting on the wall, creating groups and other types of interactions with people. Also, every time one logs to in Facebook, he/she will see updates about his/her friends. It is a great way to see the daily lives of friends and family that one sees every day according to Andrus (2012). Furthermore, Facebook currently boasts 800 million active users, and over 50% of active users log on to the site every day. Members are able to connect with friends on the site, and the average user maintains approximately 130 friends.

A similar study, conducted by Barbu, Alina (2012), sought to understand seafaring personnel' motivation in using Facebook and fanning, or liking, particular brands on the social networking site. The researchers found seafaring personnel use the site to establish personal connections with others and use the site to create affiliations with brands that define who they are and help them establish a sense of self.

**Table 4. The mean deviation of coping with homesickness in terms of Social Interaction**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Weighted mean</b>	<b>Verbal Interpretation</b>
Facebook enables the seafarers to interact with people they already know or to meet new people.	3.60	Strongly Agree
Receiving an equal treatment with my supervisors.	3.49	Agree

Table 4 continued...

He can message, chat and see his family in an instant.	3.47	Agree
It allows him to know their condition in his hometown.	3.47	Agree
Facebook provides an invaluable resource for fulfilling basic human need for social connection.	3.45	Agree
It keeps him updated from current new of his colleagues.	3.41	Agree
Facebook is a great way to see the everyday lives of his friends and family.	3.33	Agree
He can easily share the problems that he have to his family.	3.14	Agree
<b>Composite mean</b>	<b>3.42</b>	<b>Agree</b>

*1.00-1.49 Not Relevant at all, 1.50-2.49 Slightly Relevant, 2.50-3.49 Moderately Relevant, 3.50-4.00 Very Relevant*

**Table 5. The significant difference between the Filipino use of Facebook to cope with homesickness when grouped according to the profile of the respondents in age**

<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>	<b>f-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Communication	1.601	.066	Not Significant
Entertainment	2.018	.012	Significant
Social Interaction	1.006	.481	Not Significant

Table 5 presents the difference in the Filipino seafarers' use of Facebook to cope with homesickness to the demographic profile of the respondent in terms of age in which entertainment implied significant difference. It shows that the younger Filipino seafarers use Facebook more often than the veterans for entertainment. Since most of the

respondents are veterans in cruise line industry they may rather rest than to spend time in Facebook entertainment.

This result can be supported by the study of Marketing Charts Staff (2013) wherein aged 18- 64 who used social networks say they spend an average of 3.2 hours per day doing so. Specifically, 18 to 34 year olds report spending 3.8 hours per day while those who are aged 35 to 49 spend 3 hours per day and 50-64 year olds report spending 2.4 hours per day.

**Table 6. The significant difference between the Filipino use of Facebook to cope with homesickness when grouped according to the profile of the respondents in sex**

<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>	<b>f-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Communication	.339	.562	Not Significant
Entertainment	3.155	.079	Not Significant
Social Interaction	.169	.682	Not Significant

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Table 6 presents the extent of Filipino seafarers' use of Facebook to cope with homesickness according to their sex has no significant difference, according to the interpretation of the results delivered by the respondents. Since Facebook doesn't require specific sex for the people who want to use it. In terms of communication the result shows that there is no significant difference between the usage of male and female, since messenger is also for everyone. As an Entertainment, seafarers use Facebook for almost 2 hours a day and when they have no work they use it for almost four hours. Farmville, a game is famous in Facebook. Many seafarers, both men and women,

spent their time playing it because it is a calm game where you do not have to fight other people, you just have to take care of your own virtual farm. It gave seafarers a sense of responsibility when they play it. (Flanagan, Nissenbaum 28-29). In terms of social interaction, there are a lot of people who are timid, but very talkative in social media and no study shows that only male or female can be talkative or socially active in Facebook.

This result can be supported by the study of Joinson (2016) wherein men and women use Facebook to interact with their family who are far away. The use of Facebook is one of their ways to express their feelings and emotions, to say anything that they can't say personally. It is a helping hand to be close to other people that they would like to be friends with. In 2011, Ellison, Lampe, Smock and Wohn analyzed on why men and women use Facebook in general. They found out that it motivates people to share information, for relaxing entertainment, to have someone's company, to pass time, and for social interaction purposes. Smock et al. (2011) also learned that the usage of Facebook chat is important for social interaction. It is evident that there is also a significant difference when it comes to the Brain Drain according to their respective sex. It is exactly as what the Co-President of the Professional Women's Network, Dr. Ines Wichert (2017) stated in our review of literature saying that women are well-fitted for international assignments because of their passive and strong interpersonal skills which can make an important difference when a person has to show cultural sensitivity and build relationships with new colleagues and customers once working abroad. This also supports the idea of Tremethick (2016) that when it comes to hiring females were excellent too especially in networking skills, fluency in a foreign language and strong selling skills.

**Table 7. The significant difference between the Filipino's use of Facebook to cope with homesickness when grouped according to the profile of the respondents in years of service**

<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>	<b>f-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Communication	2.800	.001	Significant

Table 7  
continued...

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Entertainment	2.399	.003	Significant
Social Interaction	1.891	.023	Significant

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Table 7 presents the extent of Filipino seafarers' use of Facebook to cope with homesickness according to their years of service in the cruise ship. The interpreted results show that there is a significant difference between the years of service and their coping mechanisms in relation with communication, entertainment and social interaction of the seafarers. The researchers concluded that the communication made by the young seafarers and the veteran seafarers, has a difference since veterans are used to being far away from their family because of the long experience working on board rather than the young seafarers who is beginner working far from their family. In terms of entertainment the younger seafarers spent their time for the facebook entertainment to occupy free time or when they were bored while the older spent their free time taking a rest. As well as the significant difference in terms of social interaction since most of the respondents work on board more than years it is safe to say that they are more often to interact with their family than to interact with new people on Facebook.

This result can be supported by the study of International Transport Workers' Federation (2015), wherein seafaring is a stressful occupation, with long hours and fatigue often posing problems for the crew, so it's important to take steps and stay well. This is one of the greatest role of communication in regard to the seafaring profession. There is a significant difference between the service and the social interaction of the people. Similar to Slišković, A., & Penezić, Z. (2016) study, which talks about the relationships between diverse factors of contract, ways of communication and a seafarer's health condition. All in all, the study concluded that having a shorter contract, availability of internet and obedience within the said contract result to give a great satisfaction and good health with the seafarers.

**Table 8. The significant difference between the Filipino use of Facebook to cope with homesickness when grouped according to the profile of the respondents in marital status**

<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>	<b>f-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Communication	.693	.503	Not Significant
Entertainment	.608	.547	Not Significant
Social Interaction	.497	.610	Not Significant

The table 8 shows that there is no significant difference within the status between communication, entertainment and social interaction within the Filipino seafarers. Simply because in using Facebook to communicate, to have entertainment and to socially interact with other people, Facebook doesn't require a person's status in life. So there is nothing to do with the status of the respondents to use Facebook to cope with their homesickness.

This result can be supported by the study of Ayap and Macalalad (2016) wherein Facebook can be an effective tool for coping with feelings of social disconnection disregarding of the status in life. Being disconnected drives its use and getting connected its rewards. Exclusion from the social group impacts negatively on a variety of variables, including one's self-esteem and sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and sense of life meaning, purpose, self-efficacy and self-worth.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

With the use of the descriptive research design, the researchers first concentrated on identifying the focus of the study then collected data through survey questionnaires. After analyzing and interpreting the data, the researchers concluded that the researchers had the average of thirty-five years of age for their respondents and most of them are male, which is seventy eight percent. A huge number of them have a family and they have a mean length of 10 years service in a

cruise ship. Their compensation can get a figure of more than seven hundred thousand yearly.

Moreover, in terms of communication, most of them are using Facebook to be able to sustain their relationships with their families and loved ones. Being updated on current news suchlike happenings in their hometown, standing of their favorite team sport and others have a huge amount of impact under entertainment. Interacting with someone during free times were affecting the seafarers knowing that use of Facebook to connect with a friend in a convenient way is very relevant to them.

On the other hand, the data gathered showed that seafarers vary in terms of entertainment whether they are young or old. But in relation with communicating and interacting with other people, age does not matter. Male and female does not differ in the corresponding variables. It has a lot to say when it comes to years of service because the seafarers had different perceptions unto it. The results were in contrast in regards with the marital status. In relation to that, nothing much has changed when annual salary was the subject.

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