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**POLITICAL COMMUNICATION, ICTs AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*This article examines the place of ICTs in promoting political development in Nigeria. It argues that ICT is a strong instrument in the field of communication and that when employed by political activists, politicians, political parties and governments, it has the tendency of ensuring development in the political sector. Since the inception of political activities on May 29, 1999, political communication has been on the increase but not without electoral rigging, political intimidation and apathy on the part of citizens. The use of old media technologies which are not only capital intensive but limited in accessibility and devoid of citizens' participation is the major reason for the political backwardness observed in most third world countries. As, the country's nascent democracy takes a new turn for growth, there is need<sup>1</sup> for the adoption of new media technologies in the political activities of the country especially in the bid to concinnities the people politically and increase the effectiveness of political communication amongst citizens. Therefore, governments, political activist, citizens and political parties should re-examine their media of communication and find a "way to incorporate a better communication channel that would be all Encompassing, deep in penetration, cost effective and audience participation-friendly.*

**Introduction**

Over the years, the place of the mass media in political communication has occupied the thoughts of several scholars. This is not unconnected to the fact that the media of communication contribute to the effectiveness of political communication.

However, the use of the mass media for political communication has experienced several problems. This is the reason Olayiwola (1991, p. 33) notes that, "the problem of examining the role of the mass media in political communication and their effects on national issues, electoral campaigns in particular, is not confined to Nigeria. Anywhere in the world, the press has always been involved in politics, formation of public opinion, perception of images of candidates for political offices, the definition of social reality and social norms, education, information, enlightenment and entertainment of the public, as well as the presentation and clarification of issues, values, goals and changes in culture and society". In fact, Berelson (1948 as cited in Olayiwola, 1991, p. 33) sums it up when he notes that, "some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions (through some kinds of channel.) "have some kinds of effects.

In the same vein, Olayiwola (1991, p.34) notes that the first elected President, Alhaji Shehu Shagsiri, acknowledged the responsibility of the press while speaking on media and national Cation, when he observed that the press as the fourth estate of le realm,, has weighty responsibilities to the nation. "On your of fostering national cohesion and belonging to our people... The press is in a very unique position in that it possesses power that can either destroy or build. The power is deadly as well as redeeming...Journalists in Nigeria have over the years the years demonstrated these two and powers of the press"; Since independence, the mass have demonstrated their influence; in the politics of the country.

Along with the effort of the mass media in political, ICTs have really proved a more promising platform that is more timely and tangible in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In most developed nations, it has taken the centre stage of political communication. It has even reached the extent that the people normally referred to as the onlookers in the media of communication are now part of the key the communication process. They are in most cases referred to as citizen political journalists, these groups of people is private blogs for their news communication purposes other cases contribute comments that serve as part of the r\$ stories published by prominent media houses in their online news publications. There is no doubt, therefore, that the Internet is of the most promising aspects of ICTs that has shown endous future for political communication.

In support of the above stated position, Blumler and Kavanagh (1999, p.219) explain that there would be a, "third age of political communication in which print and broadcast media would lose their place as the central channels of political communication in a new age of information abundance". Political communication, they argued, was undergoing a qualitative shift: "they once commanded". These authors were conscious of the fact that the new media would serve a significant role in the political spheres of countries all over the world. Blumler and Kavanagh (1999, p. 213) add that, "political news, information, and ideas can be circulated by computer". Analyzing this statement, Ward and Cahill (2011, p.1) observe that, "what Blumler and Kavanagh had in mind was that, "the 'Internet Web<sup>1</sup> and communication technologies with the capacity for a two-way flow of information which allow consumers to seek out specific kinds of news can be used to circulate information". Ward and Cahill add that the authors, "could not have

anticipated the phenomenon of blogging which has since burgeoned in the USA as a vehicle for uninhibited political commentary, even for the breaking of political news" (p.1). This article, therefore examines whether the use of ICT for political communication can be of tremendous benefit to political development in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the problem**

The traditional media of mass communication: newspapers, magazines, television and radio are top-down channels of communication that give the readers, viewers listeners less room to react to messages dropped on them by government, the elite, political parties, and interest groups. As such, to the senders, the messages do not create impact. This, no doubt, has development in most third world countries.

However, with ICT, the issue tends to be different because these media of communication are flexible and create room for interaction. With the internet, for instance, the people formally referred to as the on-lookers in the traditional media of communication are now active participants in the entire communication process and as such can easily be influenced by the kind of communication they are part of.

Unfortunately, notwithstanding the tremendous benefits occurring from the use of new media technologies e.g ICTs, most political activist, politicians, political parties, governments, media houses and citizens are yet to reap the dividends of the new media technology in political communication.

### **Objectives of the study**

This study set out to:

- 1) Examine whether ICTs can facilitate political communication in Nigeria.
- 2) Find out whether ICTs have an effect on the political perspectives, processes, opinions and attitudes of the people.
- 3) Determine whether there are factors militating against the adoption of ICTs in political communication in Nigeria.
- 4) Examine ways by which the problems militating against the adoption of ICTs in the political communication of the country can be solved.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) How many ICTs facilitate political communication in Nigeria?
- 2) What kind of effects can ICTs have on the political perspectives, processes, opinions and attitudes of the people?
- 3) What are the factors militating against the adoption of ICTs in the political communication of the country?
- 4) What are the ways to mitigate factors militating against the adoption of ICTs in the political communication of the country?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on two theories of mass communication known as Development Media Theory, and Democratic Participant Media Theory. According to Ojobor (2002, p.14). Citing Okunna (1999), the Development media Theory “emerged in the 1980s to fill the void which became increasingly noticeable as the gap between the developed and developing countries widened. As the gap widened, it became apparent

that none of the classical theories of the press applied strictly to developing countries, though the mass media in these countries were operating according to some of the principles of the classical theories”.

The Development Media Theory, therefore, ‘stands for positive use of the media in national development, for the autonomy and cultural identity of a particular national society and for participative communication models, which favour democratic, grassroots involvement” (Ojobor, 2002, p.15). This theory centres on the use of the mass media for the development needs of the people, especially by encouraging political participation of the people and the encouragement of democracy. The theory holds that the media can serve as a strong tool for political development.

The relevance of this theory to this work is anchored on the fact that it calls for participative communication models and democratic/grassroots involvement in the development of Third World countries. This form of communication is possible through the use of ICTs. This is because ICTs encourage and create room for participative and interactive communication and the involvement of the people at the grassroots without the control of the elite and journalists.

The democratic-participant media theory is a theory for horizontal rather than vertical (top-down) communication. The theory is an expression of disillusionment with established political parties and the type of democracy that has detached itself from its grassroots origins (jobor 2002). MQuail (1987, p.123) outlined the following principles as the bases of Democratic-participant Media Theory:

- 1) Individual citizens and minority groups have rights of access to media (rights to communicate) and rights to be served by media according to their own determination of need.
- 2) The organization and content of media should not be subject to centralized political or state bureaucratic control.
- 3) Media should exist primarily for their audiences and not for media organizations, professionals or clients of the media.
- 4) Groups, organizations and local communities should have their own media.
- 5) Small scale, interactive and participative media forms are better than large scale, one-way, professionalized media.
- 6) Certain social needs relating to mass media are not adequately expressed through individual consumer demands, nor through the state and its major institutions. Communication is too important to be left to professionals.

This theory suggests new media of communication that would accommodate the participation of the citizens and the need to be adopted in the interest of political development.

This theory, therefore, is relevant to this study because it proposes a horizontal form of communication that cuts through the society, while engaging everyone positively. It encourages the use of new media of communication for the political needs of the people in such a way that communication is not left in the hands of those who assume the role of professionals.

**Political communication:** Graber and Smith (2005, p.479) see political communication as encompassing, “the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics. The message senders or message receivers may be politicians, journalists, members of interest groups, or private, unorganized citizens”. In this definition, Graber and Smith see political communication as messages that are politically-oriented whether they are being sent or received by private individuals, media houses, politicians or political activists. Supporting this assertion, Graber (1993,p.305) notes that, “the key element (in the definition of political communication) is that the message has a significant political effect on the thinking, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals, groups institutions, and whole societies and the environments in which they exist”. These definitions imply that political matters either directly or indirectly for the aim of achieving political effects. In this case, both the sender(s) and the receiver(s) are political entities with political interests.

Considering the definitions above, it means that the Internet, World Wide Web, blogs, and mobile phones are media of communication that would further enhance political communication in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**ICT:** Mbam (2006, p.60) sees information/communication technology as, “the communication and technology that involve the application of electronic equipment, especially the computer, to the gathering analysis, storage, retrieval and transmission of information as part of man’s effort to find solutions to the multifarious problems facing him. In other words, IC could be seen as the application of computer hardware and software components, telecommunication equipment, and electronics in finding solutions



to the multifaceted problems of mankind”. It, therefore, implies that ICT is a new media technology that influences the process of manipulating, processing and utilizing information.

Uwakwu (2004, p.11) notes that, “the information and communication age came along with many possibilities. Indeed, the advances in information and communication technologies have brought hope to the modern humans. In the West for instance, great transformations in the lives of the people, are in part, a function of advances in new information and communication technologies”.

Today. Humans talk about faxes, computers, satellite, mobile phone, the Internet, video text and telex. Others include tele-medicine, e-business, e-enterprise, e-commerce, e-trading, e-fund transfer, e-mail, e-library, e-conferencing and e-research (Uwakwe, 2004). Okunna (2004, p.20), affirms that, “these technologies are variously called new communication technologies or new information technologies (NITs), which have given rise to the Information Highway or Information superhighway. All these have to do with the online world, which William Gibson named “cyberspace”. Considering the wired range of human activities that involved the aid of new media technologies, one cannot but conclude that ICTs have really influenced all areas of human lives.

**Development:** Walter Rodney once commented that, “development in human society is a many-sided process” (Rodney, 2009, p.1). He looked at it from the social, economic and individual lives of the people. Broadly speaking, therefore, development, “means to improve, to make progress, change for the better, increase income ro better living standard. Increase in the quantity of goods and services available to people and thereby

the quality of their lives. Social and material advancements which enable people to gain greater control of their environment” (Abah, 2000, p.4).

Onah (2006, p.15) observes that, “the fundamental feature of what we may, for want of a better term, call the new concepts of development is their concern with mankind. Development is conceived as a state of human well-being rather than as the state of the national economy”. This concern was expressed in a statement known as the Cocoyoc Declaration, which was adopted by participants at a seminar organized by the United National Council on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Cocoyoc, Mexico, in 1974. It states:

Our first concern is to redefine the whole purpose of development. This should not be to develop things have basic need: food, shelter, clothing, health, education. Any process of growth that does not lead to their fulfillment or, even worse, disrupts them is a travesty of the idea of development (Cocoyoc Declaration, quoted in Ghai 1977, p.6 and cited in Onah 2006, p.15).

It should be noted also that one major primary need of humans as social beings is to be able to relate with the environment through communication. ICTs no doubt, facilitate the ability of everyone in the society to engage in the process of communication for development needs.

In line with the Cocoyoc Declaration, political development, therefore, is the ability to develop the political environment through active participation in the political process around him.

### **Political communication in Nigeria**

Olayiwola Olalekan conducted a study in 1991 titled Political Communications: Press and Politics in Nigeria's second Republic. The researcher observed that ownership of the mass media in Nigeria tends to determine how they are used for political communication in the country. The study maintained, however, that the fact of ownership is not the only determinant of how the mass media are used for moulding the citizen's perception of political reality in the country, but that it is also a more precise means of understanding and investigating the role of the press in political stability or instability, national integration or disintegration.

During the colonial era, media ownership in colonial Nigeria was dominated by missionaries, colonial administrators, nationalists, political parties, politicians and private foreign organizations, during the colonial period, the press served as a medium of sustained public debate and political protest, an uncompromising advocate of administrative and political reforms, and a seething critic of the excesses of the colonial order. By its political activities, the press not only stimulated the emergence of nationalist movements but also played a prominent role in the constitutional development of modern Nigeria (Oliyuwola, 1991).

Oluwiywola further states that there were mixed party and non-party media, government-owned and controlled media, political-party newspapers and the press of

private concerns, during the first republic, 1960-1966. The impact of ownership on these way largely reflected in their coverage of national issues of paramount importance, such as the census, election campaigns, regional crises, ethics and group interests, among many others. The leading political party newspapers were not only locked in vicious combat but also all the media provided remarkable examples of over-zealous, irresponsible, partisanship and recklessness. The seeds of mutual distrust, running battles and unending confrontations between regional media and the federal media, on the one hand, and between different regional media and political party newspapers, on the other hand all of which were sown during the colonial, independence and first republic periods, are still germinating.

The northern region's government paper, *The citizens*, described the Ibos as being industrious, migratory..... impenetrably united tribesmen', adding that, for the census, they flew to the east, inflated the population there, and returned smiling to continue to thrive affluently in the North. One cartoon in the paper portrayed Ibos as pidgin-speaking cannibals. The Eastern regional government-owned paper, the *Nigeria outlook*, carried stereotypes of the North, particularly in the editor-in-chief's 'Saturday catechism'. He spoke of the NPC leaders' 'childishness and amateurishness' by which they showed 'they are not seasoned rulers of the North'. He added: 'The North cannot afford a break-up of the Republic. They have nothing up there to eat. They have little education. Their art of government is primitive. Hey have no access to the sea'.

During the military regime, Olayiwola (1991, p36) points out that, "it was the general belief of the Nigeria military regimes that unrestricted circulation of newspapers

could constitute a danger to their government, hence they promulgated all kind of decrees to gag the press. These decrees, however, did not stop the press from commending on many of the wrongdoings under the military. The Gowon era provides a good example of open confrontation between the press and military rulers, and this eventually contributed to the fall of Gowon in 1975”.

As for political communication in the second republic, the 1979 constitution also required special obligations from the press on fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy. In fact, the Federal Electoral Commission decided in its guidelines for party registration that whatever amount spent by registered political parties on political communications through the mass media would be one of the factors to be taken into consideration for the purpose of determining election expenses (Olayiwola, 1991).

Udejah (2004, p.205) notes that, “during the 1999 policies, the role of public service broadcasting became evident in reporting and interpreting political events, defining trends in the transition process and in educating the population politically through news and current affairs programmes. The private broadcasting stations became preoccupied with projecting the personalities of candidates through political advertising. This enabled some candidates of such political image-promoting adventure to gain some competitive advantage”.

Even in this recent time, under the YarAdua/Jonathan led administration, the media still perform the same function in their political communication. However, in the 2010/2011 electioneering campaign, a few politicians were able to make use of the new

media of communication vis a vis the internet. For example President Jonathan's campaign photograph was on Facebook. He was able to communicate to his facebook friends on the political issues of the day. Also, governor Uduaghan of Delta State and Babatude Fashola of Lagos State were on facebook for their electioneering campaigns. These are a few of the many instances where ICT can be of invaluable benefit to political communication.

### **Internet as new Publishing platform for Political News**

In the study conducted by Ward Ian and James Cahill in 2011 on Old and new Media: Blogs in the third age of Political Communication, the researchers concluded that blogging does have significant economic advantages over the traditional media. The aim of the study was to explore the emergence of a "blogosphere" which threatens to disturb, if it has not already ruptured, what Blumler (2001, p.204) describes as the "straight forward top-down character of mainstream political communication in which issues of the day are mainly defined and discussed by politicians, journalists, experts and interest group leaders".

According to the authors, the Internet offers an unprecedented confluence of low cost production, distribution and marketing in a single publishing platform with minimal barriers to entry. At least in the USA, this distinctive political economy has seen an explosion of bottom-up, grassroots journalism and political discussion without the centralized direction, large-scale funding, and editorial control which are hallmarks of traditional news media. US bloggers have had an impact upon the established news media

which extends well beyond driving them to publish their own j-blogs. In effect bloggers now constitute a ‘fifth estate’, fact-checking and- often obsessively – analyzing the output of mainstream news media including their coverage of politics. In some cases, bloggers have also shaped the course of political events by publicizing issues originally overlooked by traditional news media (Ward and Cahill (2011, p.1).

Initially, the creation of complementary on-lien platforms by mainstream news outlets had no discernible impact on the long-term trends of concern to media and political communication scholars namely, the increasing concentration of media ownership; the embrace of infotainment’ at the expense of ‘serious’ public affairs coverage; and the increasing dominance of relatively small number of elite voices. None of these new technologies, either alone or together, provide a complete publishing platform encompassing production, distribution and marketing or obviated the need for very significant capital investment in news production. In this respect, the blogosphere is different. Blogs are inexpensive to establish and have all the raw elements of a new publishing platform: ‘unlike newspapers or television news, blogging is not capital intensive’ (Gill 2005). Publishing no longer requires access to a printing press and retail distribution system, or its broadcasting equivalent. Moreover, unlike online news, blogs have begun to reshape political news (Ward and Cahill, 2011).

The confluence of low cost production, distribution and marketing in a single publishing platform with minimal entry barriers is unprecedented. There can be little doubt that, with blogging, ‘communications over the internet have greatly multiplied and amplified the voices, information, exhortations, and diatribes passing through the world

new *prims*' (Hachten and Scotton 2007, p.58). there are now blogs without any connection to the established news organizations that are devoted to the serious discussion of political issues and public affairs and which attract sufficient 'hits' to rival the audiences attract to mainstream news media. This s certainly true in the USA where, in August 2004 during the lead-up to the presidential election, the ten most popular political blogs attracted around 28 million site visits, a total roughly equivalent to the audience for America's three online cable news network's (Kline et al, 2005). In August alone the leading liberal blog, daily Kos, had seven million reader-visits, topping the 5.7 million audiences for Fox news (Ward and Cahill, 2011).

## **Methodology**

The research design for this study was the survey. Surveys allow for the study of people's opinion over a given issue of national concern. To Anaekwe (2007, p.34), "survey research is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing conditions on practice, beliefs, attitudes etc. The purpose is to describe systematically, the facts, qualities or characteristics of a given population, event or area of interest concerning the problem under investigation".

The population for this study involved staff and students of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The choice of the population was based on the fact that the students and staff of the department are familiar with the concepts of political communication and ICT.



In selecting the sample for this study, the researchers studied all the academic staff of the department. This is as a result of their manageable number. For postgraduate students of the department, they were all sampled for the same reason of their manageable numbers. However, the researcher conducted a sample of the undergraduate students of the department due to their large number. The undergraduate students from first year to final year numbered 640.

Considering Nwana's (1981) position that, "if the population for a study is a few hundreds, a 40 percent or more sample will do, if many hundreds, a 20 percent sample will do, if a few thousands, a 10 percent sample will do, and if several thousands, a few percent or less sample will do" (Ekwelem, 2009, p.102). So, a 40 percent sampling of the undergraduate students was conducted. The final sample of 220 subjects was constituted.

**Table 1:** sample for the study based on the 2009/2010 academic session.

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Figure</b>
Academic staff of the department	18
Postgraduate students of the department	74
Under-graduate students of the department	128
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>

The questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. It had two sections, the demographic and psychographic section. The demographic section elicited information

about the bio-data of the respondents while the psychographic section focused on the research questions. It personally was administered.

However, out of 220 questionnaires distributed only 198 were returned useful. This represented a 90% response rate. Collected data were analyzed using tables and simple percentages.

### **Data analysis and presentation**

The data presented here answer the research questions raised in the study.

**Table 2: ICT and facilitation political communication in Nigeria**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	198	10%
No	0	0%
Can't say	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table above shows that all the respondents were of the opinion that ICT can indeed facilitate political communication in Nigeria.

**Table 3: How ICT facilitates political communication in Nigeria**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Through the use of internet e-mails, e-conference	82	41.4%
Through the use of blogs	76	38.4%

Facebook, twitter and skype communication	34	17.2%
Creation of dynamic on-line media houses	112	56.6%
Creation of specialized websites for parties/interest groups/ paratatal/government	128	64.6%
Mobile communication (SMS and MMS)	96	48.5%

The table above indicates that 82 respondents (41.4%) agreed that the use of the internet facilities like e-mails, e-conference and so on can help facilitate political communication, while 78 (38.4%) accepted that blogs will equally be a good way out. Thirty four (34) and 112 respondents, said that facebook, twitter and skype communication, and creation of dynamic on-line media houses would help facilitate political communication. The remaining 128 (64.6%) and 96 (48.5%) respondents agreed that creation of specialized websites and the use of mobile communication (SMS and MMS) can equally facilitate political communication in the country.

**Table 4: The table below provides answer to research question two of the study under investigation**

**Political effects of ICT**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency (No=178)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Increases the political consciousness of the people	132	66.7%
Increase political participation	78	39.4%

Creates sound political ideology	24	12.1%
Reduces political mal-practices	83	41.9%
Creates feelings of political satisfaction	64	32.3%

Table 4 above shows that 132 (66.7%) respondents said ICT increases the political consciousness of the people exposed to it. On the other hand, 78 (39.4%) and 24 (12.1%) respondents agreed that ICT increases the political participation of the people and creates sound political ideology within them. While 83 (41.9%) and 64 (32.3%) stated that ICT reduces political mal-practices and creates feelings of political satisfaction.

This table provides answer to research question 3 in the research questions.

#### **Factors affecting the adoption of ICT political communication**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency (No=198)</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Computer illiteracy	148	74.7%
Inadequate internet accessibility	131	66.2%
Poor infrastructural facilities	96	48.5%
Lack of political will	112	56.5%

From table 5 above, 148 (74.7%) and 131 (66.2%) respondents agreed that computer illiteracy and inadequate internet accessibility are the major factors affecting the adoption of ICT in the political communication. Ninety-six or (48.5%) and 112 (56.6%) respondents accepted that poor infrastructural facility and lack of political will on the part

of stakeholders are the major problems affecting the adoption ICT in the country's political communication.

## **Findings**

This study found out that ICTs can be of immense value to the political communication needs of the people and that this can be achieved through the use of the internets (e-mail, e-conferencing), blogs, facebook, twitter and skype communication, creation of on-line media forms, houses, specialized websites for interest groups, political parties and governments, and the use of mobile communication (MMS and SMS). It was equally discovered that ICTs engender political development by increasing the political consciousness of the people, their political participation, reducing political mal-practices and creating sound political ideology and satisfaction. However, the study found that computer illiteracy, and lack of political are the problems militating against the adoption of ICT in the country's political communication.

## **Conclusion**

Political activities in Nigeria are at the heart of national development. With the increase in the political consciousness of the people, the need for effective political communication cannot be over-emphases. The traditional media of communication cannot do it alone. Therefore, there is every need to adopt the new media of communication in achieving the political communication needs of the people. This position is premised on the fact that the more informed people are, the more developed

they will be. Considering the number of communication outlets at the disposal of the western world, one cannot but agree that they are developed because they are more informed. The situation is not quite so in the third world.

Since positive political activities can influence positive political development which would translate into national development, it becomes imperative for the political activities of the country to be developed via political communication for true and lasting national development.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the observations highlighted in this article, the researchers recommend that:

- Governments, political parties, interest groups, political activist and citizens should review their channels of communication and see how to adopt ICT as a more comprehensive and cost effective means of getting across to the people.
- Computer literacy should be at the heart of education system in the country. This is the major way to improve and increase computer literacy amongst all and sundry and equally increase its usage, especially in the political sphere.
- Government should create a conducive environment for ICT to thrive. This would include the provision of basic infrastructural facilities and the development of political will for the adjustment that ICT would create when fully involved in the political communication of the country.

- Government should also study ICT to see how it would help the political processes in the country especially in the case of e-voting and other measures to curtail electoral fraud.

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