

**Influence of Colourism in Advertising on Skin Bleaching Tendency among Selected
Female Undergraduate Students in South West Nigeria**

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Abstract

This study examined colourism in advertising by attempting to ascertain its influence on skin bleaching tendency among female undergraduate university students in South West Nigeria. Particularly, the study aimed to look at the awareness level of female undergraduate students on the threats of skin bleaching, the motivating factors that drive female undergraduate students towards skin bleaching, the perils and challenges caused by skin bleaching and the demeanour of female undergraduate students towards the threats related to skin bleaching. The population for the study comprised female undergraduate students in seven public universities in south-west Nigeria. A sample of 420 (four hundred and twenty) female undergraduate students was drawn from seven public universities in south-west Nigeria. Data were obtained through the use of structured questionnaire and was analysed using mean and standard deviation. Major findings from the study showed that female undergraduate students are aware of perils and challenges related to skin bleaching but continue to engage in it, thanks to its perceived benefits. The study hence suggested that female undergraduate students be educated concerning the hazards related to skin bleaching and should also be enlightened on the illusion of their perception that light skin is better and more beautiful than dark skin.

Keywords: colourism, skin bleaching, beauty perception, advertising, female undergraduate

Introduction

Colourism is based on a general philosophy that believes there is a discrimination against individuals with darker skin tones. It is the preference or separation that happens against people with a dark skin tone, ordinarily among individuals of the same ethnic or racial group – (Walker 1983, Jones-Williams 2021). I experienced my first discrimination amongst skin tones when I was eleven years old. In my view, colourism is an epidemic, one so ingrained in our subconscious that we are unaware of it. The birth of a newborn is exciting. However, right after the gender of the birth is revealed, African mothers and aunties proceed to check the ears of the child if it is dark, the baby will eventually be dark

but otherwise, it will be fair. The general consensus is that being fair in complexion is always nice. A day old baby has already experienced colourism. The glorification of the light skin tone and the adoration of mixed race babies are deep-rooted in colourism which dates back to colonialism and the slave trade. It is safe to say that you cannot discuss this topic without colonialism and the slave trade. This ideology is highly prevalent in the world and sadly in the largest black nation on earth. It is also constantly reinforced in the media, family, and community interactions. In Africa, the question is, is black beautiful? Colourism in Advertising has made a lot of models and people feel insecure in their original dark skin tone. A lot of advertising agencies will only agree to work with fair skinned models for TV commercials, or as video vixen if she is light skinned. Gerdeman D 2017. In recent times, I have heard people say some of these brands prefer a light toned skinned person to showcase their products or someone that is mixed race with a fairer skin. In 2016, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported a story of an advertisement done in China where a black man was thrown into a washing machine after being made to swallow a pill and came out of the washing machine completely white. Also in Thailand 2016, there was an advertisement for skin-whitening pills with the motto "white makes you win" The advert featured a Thai celebrity ascribing her success to her skin complexion also, or you see an advertisement with the slogan "lighter is better", fair and lovely, or white is better. Nivea, a German company with a global reach decided to rebrand with the production of the documentary SKIN with Nigerian actress Beverly Naya in 2020. The aforementioned brand in 2017 had decided it was a good decision to promote adverts of Natural Fairness Body Lotion, a cream that guarantees "visibly fairer skin". A former Nigerian Beauty queen Omowunmi Akinnifesi was featured looking into space with a tricky grin on the sides of her lips in this TV commercial, as her skin tone progressively lightens as she applies Nivea's item to her body. This ad was distributed around West Africa. Of course, these advertisements caused a lot of outrage among people of the dark skinned tone as they felt the advertisement implied that black is not beautiful. Guardian (2017)

Skin Bleaching is not a new phenomenon, as it has been with us for decades as far back as 2000BCE, (ftekhar N. & Zhitny V.P., 2021). A lot of people think skin bleaching is done only in Africa but it is a global epidemic as it is widely practiced everywhere, including in the United States of America, South East Asia and India. World Health Organisation (WHO, 2011) reports that 77% of ladies in Nigeria bleach their skin under the guise of toning. Skin Bleaching is a deliberate use of chemicals (skin bleaching items) to realise a lighter skin colour by changing the chemical structure of the skin to hinder the natural blend of melanin (Olumide, Akinkugbe, Altraide, Mohammed, Ahamefule, Ayanlowo & Essen, 2008). Skin Bleaching is an act of using chemical substances to physically lighten one's skin tone Allen (2020). Advertising industries portray being fair or light skinned as beautiful. Most recently, with the Dove and Nivea advertisement that caused a massive outrage online, there were allegations around their advertising. In the history of many soap advertisements, there is a long history of product bigotry, whereby Dark skinned people are used as a way to illustrate the effectiveness of a product (Lewis, Robkin, Gaskal, & Njoki, 2001; Glenn, 2008; Bhattacharya, 2012).

Statement of Problem

In Mah'e (2014) the study found that the practice of skin bleaching had led to serious health crisis among its users, Lewis et.al. (2012) wrote about the risks associated with the use of dangerous cream agents which includes skin damage, skin cancer, liver disease and kidney failure. This leads us to find out if Colourism in advertising Influences skin bleaching tendency among selected female undergraduate students in South West

Nigeria, using the AIDA model of advertising. This skin bleaching is usually stemmed from the belief that light skinned ladies are better looking and more suitable than dark skinned ladies for use in media campaign. In a bid to make themselves “adequate”, a good number of dark skinned ladies have resorted to skin bleaching in order to give themselves better opportunities due to the perception of beauty and light skin. This has exposed them to the possible harms that can result from skin bleaching. It is on the backdrop of this challenge that this study is undertaken with the aim of exploring how colourism influences advertising and indirectly skin bleaching among female students in Nigeria.

Objective of the study

The general objective of this study is to explore Colourism in Advertising so as to ascertain its Influence to skin bleaching tendency among selected female undergraduate students in South West Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to determine;

- the awareness level of female undergraduate students on the dangers of skin bleaching
- the motivation behind female undergraduate students’ desire to bleach their skin.
- the challenges that occur due to skin bleaching.
- the attitude of female undergraduate students towards skin bleaching.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

- What is the awareness level of female undergraduate students on the dangers of skin bleaching?
- What is the motivation behind female undergraduate students’ desire to bleach their skin?
- What are the challenges that can result due to skin bleaching?
- What is the attitude of female undergraduate students towards skin bleaching?

Scope of Study

The scope of this study was limited to female undergraduate students in selected public universities in south west Nigeria. This region was selected because there are perceptions that people from the south west bleach their skin allot. Also, the study is limited to females since there are more females who bleach than men, this is in reference to Norwood (2015) who argues that women are often more targeted than men in bleaching products advertisement. Norwood explained that “Colorism is often gendered since its unique relationship to who and what is beautiful will likely refer women more than men” (Norwood, 2015). Furthermore, advertisement campaigns that emphasise and highlight colourism are usually for products that are geared towards female consumers, thus highlighting its gender-sensitive stance. Norwood (2015) further mentioned that 91% of skin bleaching products are solely geared for female consumers, and that 74% of beauty product adverts are modeled by light complexioned women. Though colour discrimination is general, it is however more pronounced amongst young females than any other demographic group.

Literature Review

The Concept of Skin Bleaching

Over the years, a lot has been written about skin bleaching and its effect, but not much has been written about what causes it. In our societies and the world at large, beauty has been portrayed in a certain way that panders to the bias of the media. No thanks to the media, which has over the years fortified the notion that whiteness and the features and characteristics associated to it were superior and more alluring than darkness (Johnson 2016). In arts and media, once you are dark skinned, you are rendered invincible. You

hear things like the camera will not pick images well if you are dark skin, or production will not come out clear enough. White is associated with purity, holy, clean while black is unholy, dirty, evil. Even in the Christian faith, the devil is portrayed as black while God and his angels are white (Holmes, R. 2015, Grewal, D. 2017). These and many more examples can affect a dark skinned person into bleaching their skin just to appear visible. According to Anyakoha, Odenigbo & Akata (2021), media platforms should not only be used by producers but also by regulatory body to promote responsible information and counter any false claims. If this is done, it will counter false claims that fair is beautiful and dark is ugly as people assume.

Fair skinned model are often used in skin bleaching advertisements with the objective to sell the idea that beauty is light complexion (Demonds, 2014). These has made people who bleach believe that having a lighter skin tone makes them more socially acceptable as well as increase their chances of getting the desired attention they seek from their male counterpart compared to dark skinned people (Jannink, 2009; Blay, 2011; Durosaro, Ajiboye & Oniye, 2012; Dlova, Hamed, Tsoka-Gwegweni, Grobler & Hift, 2014). Colourism is a global ideology which is prevalent in the black communities with steady support from the media, family, and community interactions. The media in a way promotes colourism either subconsciously, such as in films, journalisms, and advertising.

AIDA Model of Advertising

The AIDA model was created by the American businessman, E. St. Elmo Lewis, in 1898. It is an acronym that stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action model. This is an advertising effect model that distinguishes the various stages a person goes through before purchasing a product. Lewis, states that the role of an advertisement is to draw in clients. Once an advertisement gets attention, it needs to invoke interest towards the product within the minds of the consumers. After making an interest, the advertisement has got to bring desire in consumers mind to use the product and at long last the customer must take a favourable action towards the product by eventually obtaining the product.

This model for advertising messages, recommends four general purposes, which is to attract consideration, make interest, and invigorate desire and pushing individuals to buy (Birch, 2010 cited in Gharibi, Danesh & Shahrod). Mackey (2005) states that AIDA comprises Awareness (attention to client); Interest (improving customers' interest by centering on benefit and advantages and it is not centred on feature like in conventional advertisement); desire (persuading the purchasers that the interest of a product or service will fulfill their needs); Action (main client acts and or purchase things and services) (Li dan Yu, 2013).

Attention- An advertisement must be able to create data to capture consumers' attention. An advertising message should have the ability to capture the interest of its audience in words or in pictures. (Kotler & Armstrong 2001 in Hadiyati 2016) states that attention must contain these three: (1) Meaningful, it shows the benefits of the product or it is appealing to the consumers; (2) Believable, the consumers believe that the product will give benefit as said in the product information, (3) Distinctive, the message in the advertisement is way better than the competitor.

Interest-Interest: An advertisement should be able to viable capture the consumer's interest and this may be done when the customer effectively communicate its interest to a product or service. An advertisement ought to focus on what is most relevant for its target market by conveying only the most important message you want to communicate to consumers.

Desire-This goes hand in hand with the second step. That is, when the interest has been built, the next step is to desire the product or services. As interest enables the consumer to realise they need the product or services.

Action- This is the last step of the AIDA model in getting consumers to take action.

Empirical Studies on Skin Bleaching

Kuffour, Dartey, Owusu and Dabuoh (2014) investigated the motives for skin bleaching the results in this study showed that 39.2% of the women interviewed make use of cosmetics bleaching products, 9 women representing 7.5% have experienced side-effects and 82.4% are ignorant to the side effects of these bleaching products. Amodu, Bolori, Ahmad, Kale and Kuchichi (2018) found that the awareness level of the students about skin bleaching products and their damaging effects was found to be high. Some feel that the use of skin bleaching products can be addictive and lead to social stigma but they do not accept that the use of such products should be restricted to medical only.

According to Lewis., Robkin, Gaskal, & Njoki, (2001), motivation driving the preservation of skin-bleaching practices in Tanzania was to get rid of pimples, rashes, and skin disease; to own soft skin; to be White, “beautiful,” and a lot of European looking; to get rid of the adverse affects of extended skin bleaching use on the body; to satisfy one’s partner and/or attract male mates; and to satisfy and impress peers. It is believed that people easily get attracted to advertisement that appeals to their mind. In a related study, Amodu, et al (2018) found that most female students within the Universities in north-eastern Nigeria bleach their skin with dangerous and unsafe chemical agents implied for reasons basically to draw attention of the opposite sex despite having high information of the harmful effects. Amrit Dhillon (2016) attributed the interest of women in skin bleaching to shadeism otherwise known as colourism, which is a discrimination against darker skin tones. The study found that lighter skin operates as a style of social capital with potential to boost life possibilities. Beauty is related to fair skin and this has given rise to a lot of people wanting to bleach their skin so as to fit into the criteria of beautiful women. A study by Anekwe (2014) attributes the reason people bleach their skin is to fit within the larger society’s definition of beauty. He further stated that many African ladies have expressed that media images portraying white ladies as beautiful significantly influenced their decision to brighten up their skin. These ladies have included that in spite of the fact that skin bleaching items may have harmful impacts, they would still use these items to look and feel more beautiful. The author further asserted that these media portrayals have significantly impacted the perception and mindset of African ladies as light complexion is treated in a more revered manner.

This study adds to existing literature, there are studies on colourism and skin bleaching conducted in other schools and regions. This study looks at the South West region with the aim of acknowledging or disputing a long perception that insinuate South West girls bleach a lot since majority have black skin.

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses guided the study;

HO₁: Female students are not aware of the dangers of skin bleaching

HO₂: Female students have no motivation to bleach their skin

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

The study was anchored on the Social learning theory which was propounded by Albert Bandura. The theory emphasizes on the importance of observation, modeling and imitating the behavior, attitudes and emotional reactions of others, Anaeto SG, Onabanjo

SO, Osifeso BJ (2008). Bandura A (1986) proposed that people create common behavior and demeanors by modeling the behavior of other. People learn or model conduct, values, attitudes, and abilities through the observation of other people, or through observations of electronic, print media and modern media. The theory is of the opinion that learning first takes place through observation, before imitation. Hence, watching the conduct of others can impact adolescents' behaviour. which invariably that advertisement on television, print and modern media can influence the viewers. Media advertisement that projects fair skin ladies, women can affect adolescent into believing that one has to be fair in other to be considered beautiful. Social Learning Theory acknowledges that a lot of human behaviours are learned through observations. According to Hoffner and Buchanan (2005), young people are easily influenced once they are exposed to the media which can change their perspectives and alter their knowledge, attitude, and behaviour. This implies that young females tend to imitate people who bleach especially if the media projects fair skin ladies as what society considers acceptable beauty standards. The theory suggests that when the media constantly shows the western standard of what is considered beautiful, it can have effects on the audience, therefore, changes their perception into believing that lightening the skin is a good practice.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The area of study was South West Nigeria. The area is made up of six (6) states namely; Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Oyo States. The population of the study comprises public universities in these states, these is a result of a wider range of people in public universities. These universities and the population of students are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1: List of Public Universities used for study

S/ N	Name of University	Location	Population of female undergraduate students
1.	Adekunle Ajasin University	Akungba, Ondo State	7,310
2.	Federal University of Agriculture	Abeokuta, Ogun State	8,972
3.	Obafemi Awolowo University	Ile-ife, Osun State	16,577
4.	Afe-Babalola University	Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State	3,212
5.	University of Lagos	Akoka, Lagos State	21,617
6.	University of Ibadan	Ibadan, Oyo State	19,466
7.	Lagos State University	Ojo, Lagos State	15,901
Total			93,055

Source: Ayerigbara, 2019

Table 1 above lists the number of female undergraduate students in selected public universities in South-West Nigeria. This represents the overall population that was considered for this study.

Stratified sampling technique was used for the study. The Taro Yammane formula was used to calculate the sample size for this research. The formula is as shown below

$$n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$$

Where n = sample size

N = Population for the study

e = margin of error in calculation

$$\text{Thus sample size} = 93,055 / (1 + (93055 * 0.05^2)) = 398$$

A sample size of at least 398 female undergraduate students across the 7 public universities. Bertlett, Kotrlik and Higgins (2001 as cited in Ekwe, 2012) states that "if the researcher decides to use over sampling, let him estimate the response rate as a means of calculating for it" (pg59). However, for purposes of over-sampling, a sample size of 420

female undergraduate students was used for the study. The distribution of the samples are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Sample size per school

S/N	School	Selected sample size
1.	Adekunle Ajasin Univeristy, Ondo	60
2.	Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	60
3.	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife	60
4.	Afe Babalola University, Ekiti	60
5.	University of Lagos	60
6.	University of Ibadan	60
7.	Lagos State University	60
	Total	420

Table 2 above shows the breakdown of sample size selected from the different seven federal universities used for the study. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The copies of questionnaire were distributed via google documents with the help of female student contacts in the aforementioned universities. The title of the questionnaire was titled “Female Undergraduate Students Perception of Colourism and Skin Bleaching”. Out of the 420 questionnaire sent, a total of 387 was filled and returned, indicating a return rate of 92.1%. Mean and percentage were used to answer the research questions while T-test was used in testing hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. The researcher disseminated questionnaire to respondents via Google documents and also through personal contacts in University of Lagos and Lagos State University (LASU).

Findings of the Study

The findings for the study are grouped under the research questions and the specific objectives that guided the study.

Research Question 1: What is the awareness level of female undergraduate students on the dangers of skin bleaching?

Table 3: Mean responses on the awareness of female undergraduate students on the dangers of skin bleaching

S/N	Item	X	SD	Remark
1.	Students are aware of the various side effects of skin bleaching	3.72	0.68	Significant
2.	Students choose to ignore known dangers of skin bleaching	3.81	0.81	Significant
3.	Students are aware of the enormity of the side effects of skin bleaching	3.93	0.89	Significant
4.	Students are influenced by the dangers of skin bleaching in making their decisions	3.02	0.55	Significant
5.	Students are ready to bear the side effects of skin bleaching	3.97	0.87	Significant

Source: Analysis data

Findings in table 3 above in answer to research question one showed that students are aware of the various side effects of skin bleaching and they choose to ignore these danger signs. This is evidence by the mean score of 3.72 and 3.81 respectively. Findings from the research further showed that students are not influenced by the dangers of skin

bleaching in making their decisions but are ready to bear the side effects of skin bleaching

Research Question two: What is the motivation behind female undergraduate students' desire to bleach their skin?

Table 4: Mean responses on the motivation behind female undergraduate students' desire to bleach their skin

S/N	Item	SD	SD	Remark
1.	Rating of fair skin is above that of dark skin	4.03	0.88	Significant
2.	Promoting fashionability amongst female undergraduate students	3.93	0.81	Significant
3.	Beautification purposes	3.91	0.79	Significant
4.	Helps deal with inferiority complex	3.85	0.82	Significant
5.	To attract attention of men	3.87	0.74	Significant
6.	Peer group influence	4.27	0.91	Significant
7.	For increased privileges such as higher social standing and better employment opportunities	4.05	0.84	Significant

Source: Analysis data

Findings from table 4 above shows that the female students hold a perception of a higher rating of fair skin over dark skin and that serves as a motivation for skin bleaching. Findings further showed that fashionability amongst undergraduate students, beautification purposes and dealing with inferiority complex were motivating factors that geared female undergraduate students towards skin bleaching. Findings also showed that per group influence and desire to be attractive to men were also motivating factors for female students to engage in skin bleaching

Research Question 3: What are the challenges that result due to increased skin bleaching amongst female undergraduate students?

Table 5: Mean responses of female undergraduate students on the challenges that occur due to skin bleaching

S/N	Item	X	SD	Remark
1.	Increased risk of skin cancer	3.81	0.76	Significant
2.	Higher risk of developing skin rashes	3.56	0.58	Significant
3.	Increased skin sensitivity to the sun	3.62	0.67	Significant
4.	Poor speed in wound healing	3.92	0.88	Significant
5.	Higher risk of developing flaky skin	3.77	0.79	Significant

Source: Analysis Data

Findings from the third research question shows that some of the challenges that arise as a result of increased skin bleaching include high risk of skin cancer, higher risk of developing skin rashes, increased skin sensitivity to the sun, poor speed in wound healing and higher risk of developing flaky skin.

Research Question 4: What is the attitude of female undergraduate students towards the challenges associated with skin bleaching?

Table 6: Attitude of female undergraduate students towards the challenges associated with skin bleaching

S/N	Item	X	SD	Remark
1.	The benefits of skin bleaching are worth the risks	3.92	0.89	Significant
2.	Skin bleaching increases self-confidence	3.77	0.72	Significant
3.	Ladies with lighter skin colour are treated better in the society	4.02	0.91	Significant
4.	Light skin attracts favourable attention in the society	3.66	0.61	Significant
5.	Student are already addicted to skin bleaching	3.61	0.58	Significant

Source: Analysis data

Findings from the fourth research question shows that female undergraduate students feel that the benefit of skin bleaching is worth the risk and that skin bleaching increases their self confidence. The findings further showed that there is a high perception that ladies with light skin are treated better in society and attract favourable attention, thus making those already bleaching their skin to be addicted to skin bleaching.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study showed that female undergraduate students are aware of the side effects of skin bleaching and its enormities but choose to ignore these side effects. This is line with the postulations of Ahmed and Hamid (2016) who mentioned that female undergraduate students in tertiary institutions engage in skin bleaching while fully aware of its dangers and shortcomings. It is further in agreement with the assertions of Amodu, et al (2018) who also mentioned that female undergraduate are aware of the risks of skin bleaching but view the rewards as greater than the risks. The findings from the first research question also showed that female undergraduate students feel they are ready to bear the risks of skin bleaching and are fully aware of the enormity of its downsides. These are in agreement with the views of Ajose (2005) who mentioned that female students are aware of the risks of skin bleaching and are ready to bear its risks.

The findings from the study showed that female undergraduate students engage in skin bleaching because they feel that light-skinned females are more fashionable, attract positive attention and that men find them more appealing. The findings also showed that female undergraduate students regard lighter skinned individuals as better looking and also, that peer group influence and also desire for higher social standing motivate female undergraduate students to engage in skin bleaching. These are in agreement with the views of Ofili, et al (2006) who mentioned that light complexioned individuals are usually considered more beautiful in the African context and that this drives the desire of female undergraduate students to bleach their skin. Furthermore, Olumide, et al. (2008) also mentioned that people perceive light skin as better and thus on the average, avail light-skinned individuals better opportunities.

The findings from this study showed that the challenges that occur as a result of skin bleaching include increased risk of skin cancer, higher risk of flaky skin, increased sensitivity of the skin to the sun as well as poor speed of wound healing, These are in agreement with the findings of Adebajo (2002) who mentioned that engaging in skin bleaching significantly increases risk of skin diseases and also makes the human skin react adversely to exposure to sunlight. Furthermore, Alghamdi (2010) also mentioned that increased rate of skin bleaching causes increased skin sensitivity, making the individuals more susceptible to terminal skin diseases.

Findings from the study showed that despite the dangers and challenges associated with skin bleaching, female undergraduate students still engage in it with the mindset that the benefits are more than the risks. The findings from the study further showed that some female students are already addicted to skin bleaching to the extent that they cannot stop it. These are in agreement with the findings of Durosaro, et al (2012) who mentioned that despite the known and unknown risks associated with skin bleaching, more female students are still engaging in the practice due to its perceived benefits. Azibo (2011) also mentioned that female undergraduate students are not ignorant with the dangers associated with skin bleaching but they still engage in the practice due to peer pressure and also their perception that lighter skin is better than dark skin. This is due to what the media project as beauty standards, they observe and try to imitate what they have seen. These collaborates with the social learning theory that acknowledges that a lot of human behaviours are learned through observations.

Conclusion

Colourism is a major challenge facing individuals in Nigeria, especially female undergraduate students in Nigerian universities. It creates a feeling of superiority amongst light complexioned individuals and also a perception that being light skinned is better and more advantageous. This has led to a significant increase to incidents of skin bleaching, especially amongst female undergraduate students. This study thus explored skin bleaching amongst female undergraduate students in universities in south-west Nigeria, examining the awareness of these students of skin bleaching, attitude of these students to skin bleaching, the dangers and challenges associated with skin bleaching as well as the attitude of these students towards the dangers associated with skin bleaching. Findings from the study showed that female undergraduate students in south-west Nigeria are aware of the dangers inherent in skin bleaching but continually engage in it due to what they perceive are its benefits. Furthermore, the inclination of society perceiving light-skinned people as better looking has also inclined female undergraduate students towards engaging in skin bleaching. Based on these findings, it is important to continually educate female undergraduate students on the dangers that are inherent due to skin bleaching. Furthermore, it is vital to also change the perception of these students that being light skinned is better than being dark skinned.

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