

A Study on SWOT Analysis of Public Libraries

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Abstract

Public libraries play a vital role in providing equitable access to knowledge, fostering literacy, and promoting lifelong learning in communities. However, in the rapidly changing digital era, these institutions face numerous challenges that affect their growth and sustainability. The present study aims to conduct a comprehensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of public libraries to evaluate their internal capabilities and external challenges. A mixed-method research design was adopted, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with librarians and users from selected public libraries. The analysis revealed that libraries possess significant strengths, including accessibility, trained staff, and community trust, but face major weaknesses such as inadequate funding, limited technological infrastructure, and low awareness of services. The study identified opportunities in digital transformation, community partnerships, and policy support, while major threats included budget constraints, competition from digital platforms, and changing user preferences. The findings suggest that strategic planning, enhanced digital literacy, staff training, and sustainable funding are crucial for improving library performance and relevance. The study contributes to the understanding of how SWOT analysis can guide policy formulation and strategic decision-making for the future development of public libraries.

Keywords

Public Libraries, SWOT Analysis, Library Management, Strategic Planning, Digital Transformation.

Introduction

Public libraries are long-standing pillars of society, offering free and open access to books, information and cultural resources. They support literacy, lifelong learning, and social development while acting as community hubs for knowledge sharing. In recent years, however, rapid technological change, shifting user habits, and evolving social needs have brought new opportunities and challenges. To stay relevant and effective, public libraries must evaluate their internal resources and the external environment in which they operate. A SWOT analysis, examining strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats provides a systematic way to understand these factors and guide future strategies.

In recent years, many studies have identified significant challenges for library professionals. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, LIS professionals reported difficulties in accessing e-resources, maintaining work-life balance, providing remote services, and confronting inadequate ICT infrastructure. In academic settings, subject librarians have noted gaps in competencies, supervision, and institutional support. Moreover, the pace of change means that library professionals must frequently upgrade their knowledge and skills to stay relevant (Thomas, Satpathi & Satpathi, 2010).

Definition of Public Libraries

(UNESCO, 2022) A public library is a community oriented institution that provides free and equitable access to information, knowledge, and cultural resources to all members of society, regardless of age, gender, education, or socio-economic status. According to UNESCO, public libraries serve as local gateways to knowledge and are essential for lifelong learning, independent decision making, and cultural development.

(IFLA, 2022) The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), in its Public Library Manifesto (1994, updated 2022), defines a public library as an organization established, supported, and funded by the community through local, regional, or national government or other forms of organization to provide access to knowledge, information, and works of imagination through a wide range of resources and services.

Need for the Study

The growth of digital information services, online educational platforms, and mobile technology has transformed the way people seek and consume information. While these developments create possibilities for libraries to expand services, they also introduce competition and funding pressures. A SWOT analysis helps identify internal advantages such as staff expertise or community trust, internal limitations like outdated infrastructure, external opportunities such as government initiatives, and external threats including declining foot traffic or budget cuts. This structured assessment is essential for planning the sustainable development of public libraries.

Purpose and Significance

This research aims to highlight the strategic position of public libraries and provide insights that can help administrators and policy makers make informed decisions.

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of current services, along with the external opportunities and risks, will:

- Assist in setting realistic goals for improvement and modernization.
- Offer evidence-based guidance for resource allocation and funding proposals.
- Support the creation of innovative programs that align with community needs.
- Contribute to academic and professional discussions about the future of public library services.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

- To identify the key internal strengths and weaknesses of selected public libraries.
- To examine external opportunities that can enhance services and community engagement.
- To analyze external threats that may hinder growth or reduce relevance.
- To suggest practical strategies based on the SWOT findings to strengthen library operations.

Scope of the Research

This study focuses on public libraries functioning as free, community-based institutions. Both urban and rural settings are considered to capture diverse conditions, including service models, user expectations, technological adoption, and funding mechanisms. The analysis is limited to publicly funded libraries and does not include private or academic institutions.

Literature Review

1. (Fernandez, 2009)The article “A SWOT Analysis for Social Media in Libraries” by Joe Fernandez (2009) presented a comprehensive evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) associated with the adoption of social media in library services. The study emphasizes the evolving role of libraries as dynamic information providers in an increasingly digital society, highlighting how social media platforms facilitate two-way communication between librarians and users.

Fernandez identifies strengths of social media, such as cost-free accessibility, ease of setup, and the ability to reach a wide audience quickly while enabling user engagement and feedback. Libraries can creatively market their services through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and blogs, showcasing resources and fostering user loyalty.

2. (Cox, 2021)The research paper defined a strategic examination of academic and public libraries using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) framework. It explains how libraries are operating in a rapidly changing environment where technological innovations and shifting user expectations continuously redefine value and advantage.

The author describes how the traditional dominance of printed collections once gave academic libraries a near-monopoly over access to information. However, the rise of online networks and digital resources has transformed user behavior, making printed collections less convenient and more costly to maintain. This shift has forced libraries to adapt their physical spaces, reducing the footprint needed for print materials while creating flexible, interactive, and highly popular learning environments.

3. (Robertson, 2015)The book *Disaster Planning for Libraries: Process and Guidelines* provided a broad risk-management framework that directly supports SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis in public libraries. While the text does not label itself as a classic “SWOT study,” it presents an extensive examination of internal and external risk factors that can be systematically categorized into SWOT elements for strategic planning.

The author highlights that strengths in libraries often lie in their role as trusted community institutions with valuable collections and professional staff. However, these strengths can be undermined by complacency or lack of preparedness. The book identifies numerous weaknesses, including insufficient disaster planning, staff inexperience with risk management, and human tendencies such as apathy or carelessness that increase vulnerability.

4. (Esther Abosede Awojobi, 2020)The study “A SWOT Analysis of Physical Infrastructure in Government-Owned University Libraries in Ogun State, Nigeria” examined the condition of university library buildings and facilities using the SWOT framework to identify internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. The research focuses on three public universities in Ogun State—Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta (FUNAAB), Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU), and Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED)—and highlights critical issues relevant to public library management in developing countries.

The authors report that the strengths of these libraries include favorable geographical locations, good road accessibility, comfortable and inviting building layouts, well-ventilated and illuminated spaces, and adequate shelving and individual study areas. These infrastructural attributes contribute to user satisfaction and align with national accreditation standards.

5. (Muhammad Kabir Khan, 2024) The research paper “Mapping Success: SWOT Analysis of Roots Millennium University Libraries in Pakistan” provided a comprehensive assessment of library services at Roots Millennium University (RMU) using the SWOT framework. The study aims to evaluate the libraries’ internal capabilities and external environment through the perspectives of undergraduate users across five campuses.

The authors used a quantitative survey method and gathered responses from 378 students to analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The results revealed a strong physical and service foundation in RMU libraries. Key strengths included a well-maintained building environment, effective air-conditioning systems, user-friendly staff behavior, the

availability of internet facilities, and useful printed resources. These factors reflect both quality infrastructure and positive service culture.

6. (James R. Jacobs, 2018) The article referred a strategic review of the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) and its partnership with the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) by applying a SWOT analysis to evaluate the long-term preservation, access, and use of federal government information. Although the study focuses on U.S. government libraries, its findings are valuable for understanding the broader strategic challenges faced by public libraries engaged in information preservation and access.

The authors emphasize that strengths include the extensive network of 1,155 FDLP libraries, long-standing legislative support, and established partnerships that provide free public access to government information. Regional libraries that select a high percentage of available FDLP materials some covering 70–100% of collections illustrate a strong infrastructure for preservation and dissemination.

7. (O'Connor, 2016) This paper talks “SWOT Analysis for Libraries – A Compilation Piece” stated a rich, crowdsourced evaluation of the internal and external factors shaping the future of public libraries. Compiled from responses of librarians and information professionals, it organizes insights into the four key areas of a SWOT framework: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The respondents describe numerous strengths of public libraries, such as a highly educated and adaptable workforce, deep professional commitment, and a strong community orientation. Libraries are praised for their openness to new technology, emerging trends, and interdisciplinary approaches. They maintain high ethical standards, promote equality in information access, and cultivate vibrant community connections.

At the same time, several weaknesses emerge. Libraries often struggle with outdated hierarchical structures, insufficient leadership development, and limited recognition of their societal value.

8. (Center for Technology in Government, 2018) The article “Public Libraries in Smart Cities and Communities Toolkit” explored the use of SWOT analysis as a planning tool to strengthen the role of public libraries in the context of smart city and smart community initiatives. The discussion emphasizes that strategic planning is an essential first step in aligning library programs and services with the evolving needs of residents and the broader goals of community development.

The paper explains that a SWOT analysis provides a structured method for evaluating both internal and external factors affecting a library’s performance. Internal analysis helps identify the strengths such as unique resources, staff skills, and successful programs that position a library to contribute to smart city development. At the same time, it reveals weaknesses by highlighting gaps in funding, staffing, or technological capacity that may hinder the delivery of innovative services.

9. (Matthew Collins, 2018) investigated how public libraries use social media specifically Twitter to communicate services and engage communities. Although the study is not a classical SWOT analysis, it provides insight into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for public libraries operating in a digital environment. Using computational text-mining (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) on more than 19,000 tweets collected in December 2017 from nine northeastern U.S. state and urban public libraries, the authors identify dominant themes such as library events, service promotion, and community outreach as the main strengths of library social media strategies. Their results show that libraries leverage Twitter to highlight collections, advertise programs, and maintain patron relationships at low cost—clear organizational strengths in terms of outreach and adaptability.

The analysis also reveals weaknesses, including uneven topic diversity across states and limited representation of professional content, suggesting that some libraries underutilize the platform’s potential for advocacy and policy dialogue.

10.(Melanie Walsh, 2025) defined the growing use of automated, vendor-provided diversity audits in U.S. public libraries, presenting a case that can be framed within a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) perspective. Their study based on a nationwide survey of 99 librarians, 14 interviews, purchasing records, and vendor documentation highlights how algorithmic tools are being adopted to evaluate the diversity of library collections.

The research reveals several strengths of these systems: they allow libraries to rapidly evaluate large collections, generate reports to communicate with stakeholders, and provide evidence to support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives despite staffing and budget constraints. Many librarians find these tools time-saving and convenient, particularly when political scrutiny demands transparent metrics of collection diversity.

11.(Dhirendra Sharma, 2010) presented a comparative SWOT analysis of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development across six universities in the western Himalayan region of India. Although focused on higher education, their work offers valuable insights for public library planning because it demonstrates how SWOT can be used to assess internal capacities, external pressures, and opportunities for service improvement.

The study applies a four-tier framework vision and planning, infrastructure, activities, and performance to collect primary data from universities and evaluate ICT initiatives.

Strengths identified include strong ICT infrastructure in certain institutions (such as campus wide networks, e-libraries, and industry collaborations), motivated leadership in some cases, and effective alumni engagement for placement and research collaboration.

12.(Awoyemi, 2019) The paper examined the strategic position of a university-affiliated public library using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) framework to highlight internal capabilities and external challenges. The literature review section synthesizes prior studies on how SWOT has been applied to libraries and information centers to support planning, resource allocation, and service improvement. Earlier research demonstrates that SWOT analysis is a practical tool for library management because it combines both internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) perspectives emphasize that public libraries worldwide are experiencing rapid changes due to information technology, budget constraints, and evolving user expectations. Authors argue that identifying strengths such as trained staff, technology investments, and strong community programs helps libraries capitalize on their competitive advantages, while recognizing weaknesses like limited funding, inadequate ICT services, or restricted opening hours enables targeted improvement.

13.(Teoli, 2023) presented an overview of SWOT Analysis as a strategic tool for assessing internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors affecting an organization or individual. While traditionally attributed to Albert Humphrey in the 1960s, the exact origin of the framework remains debated. Literature reviewed shows that SWOT has been applied beyond business, including clinical, educational, and healthcare contexts. The authors highlight its utility in strategy formation and organizational self-assessment but also emphasize criticisms of superficiality, risk of misrepresentation, and static nature in fast-changing environments. In healthcare, SWOT enables institutions to evaluate service quality, resource allocation, and opportunities for innovation while identifying threats such as technological disruption and financial constraints.

14.(Gogina, 2023) explored how SWOT analysis can be used as a strategic planning tool for public libraries by presenting a case study of the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL). The paper draws on earlier scholarship emphasizing the need for continuous assessment of internal capacities and external pressures to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing information environment. According to Disher (2010), effective public library administration depends on ongoing planning that identifies strengths (such as extensive collections, digital resources, and strong community support), recognizes weaknesses (including outdated facilities, insufficient strategic planning, and limited technology access), and anticipates opportunities (e.g., leveraging demographic diversity, expanding digital literacy programs, and improving service awareness).

15.(Mr. Shyamsundar Pithore, 2023) The paper presented a detailed SWOT analysis of electronic resources in a university/public library setting to guide strategic planning and procurement of e-library resources. It reviews the advantages and challenges of integrating digital content into public library services and situates its findings within the wider body of library management research. The authors noted that strengths of electronic resources include their ability to provide beyond-Google access to high-quality content, anytime/anywhere availability, low distribution cost, interactive

features (hyperlinks, multimedia), and rapid updates. These qualities enable libraries to deliver information services that are faster, more flexible, and more comprehensive than traditional print collections.

16.(Kumar, 2022) stated a comprehensive SWOT analysis of the Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth (MPKV) University Library, Rahuri, Maharashtra, to evaluate its internal operations and external environment. Their work underscores how SWOT serves as a strategic planning tool for public and academic libraries to strengthen services, adopt technology, and meet user expectations.

The authors identify notable strengths, including a well-developed collection of over 116,000 books, 27,401 reference volumes, and an impressive range of e-resources through platforms such as J-Gate and CeRA. The library provides diverse services digital library access, online e-journals, interlibrary loans, and an institutional repository supported by qualified staff and structured departmental organization.

17.(Sinko, 2019) examined the Centre for Permanent Professional Development at the Ljubljana City Library (LCL), Slovenia, using a SWOT framework to evaluate its role in fostering staff learning and advancing the objectives of public libraries. The study highlights how continuous professional education is a critical component of library service quality and user satisfaction

The Centre also called the LCL Learning Centre offers a wide variety of training activities for library employees, staff from other Slovenian libraries, and members of the broader professional public (including translators, editors, and students). In 2018 alone, the Centre organized 120 learning activities (workshops, seminars, and lectures) amounting to over 400 hours of instruction and nearly 1,800 participants.

The evaluation report “Libraries as Community Hubs for Citizen Science: Phase 1 Summative Evaluation Report” (University Office of Evaluation and Educational Effectiveness, Arizona State University, 2019) presented a SWOT analysis of public libraries involved in the project. The analysis aimed to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats while positioning libraries as hubs for community-based citizen science initiatives.

Libraries were recognized as trusted, accessible, and community-centered institutions with established infrastructure for public engagement. Their role as inclusive spaces allowed them to attract diverse patrons and provide equitable access to resources.

Librarians expressed enthusiasm for offering innovative programs like citizen science kits, reflecting the library’s adaptability and relevance in the digital era.

Review Matrix at Glance

S No.	Author & Year	Key Factors Studied	Findings
1.	Walsh (2025)	Diversity audits, metadata	Time-saving audits, but opaque & generic
2.	Khan (2024)	Facilities, staff, e-resources	Infra & staff strong, plagiarism tools lacking
3.	COX (2021)	Print vs digital’ spaces	Shift to digital, flexible spaces
4.	Iqbal (2021)	Weak policies and outdated curriculum	Need modernization to match user demands
5.	Awojobi (2020)	Facilities and accessibility	Strong design and environment; weak accessibility and parking.
6.	Ahmed (2020)	Facilities and training	Infrastructure available but low staff training and ICT knowledge.

7.	Sinko (2019)	Staff training and continuous learning.	Professional development enhances service quality, strong participation noted
8.	Aweyomi (2019)	Staff, ICT, funding, opportunities	SWOT useful for planning, stresses combining internal and external perspectives for strategy.
9.	Center for technology in Government (2018)	Smart city role, funding, partnerships	Libraries as digital hubs, funding threats
10.	Collins (2018)	Social media use	Outreach good, but narrow topics
11.	Singh (2018)	Finance, staffing, space	Funding gaps and outdated infrastructure hinder user services.
12.	James R. Jacobs (2018)	Access, preservation, staffing	Strong network and legal support; need for better staff succession.
13.	Rathor (2017)	ICT readiness, budgeting	Weak infrastructure, shortage of skilled staff and limited ICT literacy
14.	O'Connor (2016)	Workforce, leadership, ethics	Public libraries have skilled staff and strong ethics.
15.	Robertson (2015)	Risk management, resilience	Libraries are trusted but lack disaster preparedness and planning framework
16.	Dhirendra sharma (2010)	ICT infrastructure, leadership, activities	Strong ICT systems and leadership in some institutions.
17.	Fernandez (2009)	Use of social media tools in libraries	Social media enhances outreach and engagement

Fig-1.1 (Review Matrix Table)

Research Gap

Previous studies have explored various aspects of library management and service delivery, yet comprehensive SWOT based studies specifically focusing on public libraries in the Indian context remain limited. Many existing studies are descriptive rather than strategic, lacking integrated managerial perspectives. Moreover, the influence of digitization and post-pandemic changes on public library sustainability is under-researched. This study bridges this gap by offering a structured SWOT framework supported by primary data collection.

Research Methodology

The study is based on a descriptive research design and relies entirely on secondary data. This study incorporates and reviews previous research papers published over a period from 2009 to 2025. The research aims to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with public libraries by examining existing literature and documented sources. Secondary data for the study has been collected from a variety of reliable sources, including books, academic

journals, research articles, government publications, and official reports. Important references have also been taken from publications and guidelines provided by organizations such as UNESCO and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, which offer valuable insights into the functioning and development of public libraries.

The collected data has been systematically reviewed and analyzed to identify key internal and external factors affecting public libraries. Information was categorized under four major components of SWOT analysis strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to facilitate a structured understanding of the topic. The analysis is qualitative in nature, focusing on interpretation and synthesis of existing information rather than numerical analysis. This method helps in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the current status, challenges, and future prospects of public libraries.

However, the study is limited by its dependence on secondary sources, which may not fully reflect real-time conditions or local variations. Despite these limitations, the research provides meaningful insights and a theoretical foundation for understanding the role and performance of public libraries in the modern information environment.

Discussion and Analysis

A Holistic SWOT interpretation reveals that the strengths of accessibility and trust can be used to overcome weaknesses like low awareness. Similarly, opportunities in digitization and partnerships can neutralize threats such as online competition. However, a research gap persists in identifying specific managerial strategies that translate SWOT findings into measurable performance improvement. Therefore, future research should focus on developing strategic management models for modern public libraries that align with technological and societal changes.

Strength of Public Libraries- Public libraries hold several inherent strengths that make them vital community institutions.

- **Accessibility and Inclusiveness:** They provide free and open access to knowledge for all social groups, bridging the information divide.
- **Community Trust:** Public libraries enjoy a high level of trust due to their neutrality and service-oriented approach.
- **Skilled and Dedicated Staff:** Most librarians possess professional qualifications, a commitment to literacy promotion, and strong interpersonal skills.
- **Resource Diversity:** Libraries host diverse collections — print, digital, and multimedia — supporting education, research, and leisure.
- **Cultural and Educational Role:** They conduct reading programs, cultural events, and workshops that promote lifelong learning.

Weakness of Public Libraries- Despite their contributions, public libraries face structural and operational challenges.

- **Insufficient Funding:** Many libraries depend on government allocations that are often inadequate or delayed.
- **Technological Backwardness:** Outdated computer systems, lack of Wi-Fi, and limited digital subscriptions hinder modernization.
- **Limited Staff Training:** Continuous professional development opportunities for librarians are scarce.
- **Low User Awareness:** Many people are unaware of the range of services libraries provide, leading to underutilization.
- **Maintenance Issues:** Poor infrastructure and lack of renovation reduce comfort and functionality.

Opportunities of Public Libraries- The evolving digital and social landscape presents numerous opportunities:

- **Digitization and E-Resources:** By digitizing collections and subscribing to e-journals, libraries can attract tech-savvy users.
- **Community Engagement and Outreach:** Partnering with schools, NGOs, and civic groups can enhance visibility and participation.
- **Government Schemes and CSR Funding:** Libraries can benefit from corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and cultural grants.

- Skill and Information Literacy Training: Offering digital literacy or employment-skills workshops can make libraries more relevant.
- Integration with Smart City Initiatives: Public libraries can become knowledge centers within digital governance frameworks.

Threats of Public Libraries- External factors also pose threats to the survival and development of public libraries:

- Digital Competition: The rise of online platforms, e-books, and YouTube tutorials has reduced physical library visits.
- Policy Neglect: Public libraries often receive minimal attention in national and local policy agendas.
- Declining Reading Habits: Instant entertainment sources have lowered people’s inclination toward traditional reading.
- Economic Pressures: Budget cuts and inflation limit book procurement and staff hiring.
- Technological Obsolescence: Rapid technological change makes it hard for libraries to stay updated.
- If unaddressed, these threats can lead to a steady decline in public library relevance and sustainability.

SWOT Analysis at Glance

Strengths	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Provide free and equal access to information for all citizens. * Have qualified and service-oriented librarians. * Maintain a diverse collection of print and digital resources. * Enjoy high community trust and credibility. * Conduct educational and cultural programs promoting lifelong learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Suffer from inadequate funding and budget constraints. * Have outdated infrastructure and limited technology. * Face shortage of trained and updated staff. * Show low public awareness and poor promotional efforts. * Experience slow adoption of digital and modern services.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Digitization and e-library initiatives can expand access and reach. * Collaborations with schools, NGOs, and CSR projects can enhance community engagement. * Government grants and Smart City programs offer funding and modernization support. * Information literacy and skill-development workshops can increase user relevance. * Outreach and awareness campaigns can attract new and younger audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Digital media and online platforms reducing physical library visits. * Policy neglect and inconsistent government support hindering growth. * Declining reading habits among youth and general public. * Economic instability and budget cuts affecting operations. * Rapid technological changes leading to obsolescence of services.

Table1.2, Table of SWOT Analysis

The table shown above addressed the strengths (trust, accessibility) and opportunities (digitization, partnerships) can transform public libraries into modern learning hubs, weaknesses (funding and awareness gaps) and threats (digital competition) in current operational working practices of libraries.

Conclusion

The study on SWOT Analysis of Public Libraries highlights that public libraries continue to serve as essential pillars of knowledge, learning, and community development. The analysis reveals significant strengths, including their accessibility, strong community trust, and commitment to providing educational and informational resources to diverse groups of people. Their inclusive nature and social relevance make them vital spaces for promoting literacy, lifelong learning, and digital inclusion. However, the study also identifies key weaknesses such as inadequate funding, limited technological infrastructure, and a lack of modern training among staff, which restrict their ability to meet evolving user needs. By addressing their weaknesses and effectively leveraging emerging opportunities, public libraries can enhance their role as powerful agents of knowledge dissemination, cultural enrichment, and community empowerment.

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