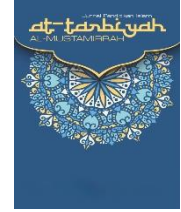




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Article

## Age Restrictions on Social Media Access for Teenagers Under 16: An Analysis of Its Urgency from the Perspective of Character Education in the Digital Era.

Yen Happy Rahmi<sup>1\*</sup>, Muhammad Zadri<sup>2</sup>, Zulfani Sesmiarni<sup>3</sup>, Hidayani Syam<sup>4</sup>  
Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia<sup>1-4</sup>

\*Corresponding Author: [yenheppyrahmi@gmail.com](mailto:yenheppyrahmi@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

Social media among adolescents has a significant impact on behavior, psychological well-being, and character development in the digital age. These developments have given rise to various issues, such as exposure to age-inappropriate content, digital addiction, and a decline in the quality of social interactions; consequently, the Indonesian government has formulated a policy restricting social media access for adolescents under the age of 16 as an effort to protect the younger generation. This study aims to analyze the impact of social media use on adolescents, examine government policies regarding age restrictions on social media access, and assess their urgency from the perspective of Islamic character education in the digital age. This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical research design through library research. Data sources were drawn from scientific literature such as books, indexed journals, and policy documents relevant to the research focus. Data analysis was conducted by examining, classifying, and synthesizing various theories and study findings related to social media, adolescent development, digital policies, and Islamic character education. The findings indicate that social media use has complex effects on adolescents, both positive and negative, particularly in social, psychological, and behavioral development aspects. Age-restriction policies for social media access are considered highly urgent as a form of preventive protection against digital risks faced by adolescents. From the perspective of Islamic character education, such policies are relevant for supporting the process of internalizing moral values, such as self-control, responsibility, and etiquette in the use of digital technology.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Adolescents, Islamic Character Education, Age Restrictions, Digital Age.

### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought about significant changes in the lives of adolescents, particularly in their use of social media (Jungselius, 2024) (Yasmine et al., 2025). Social media not only serves as a means of communication but has also become an integral part of adolescents' social identity and lifestyle (Azem et al., 2023) (Shintia Ira

Claudia & Sa'diyah El Adawiyah, 2024). Various digital platforms make it easy to share information, express oneself, and build extensive social networks (Hermann et al., 2026). The high intensity of social media use indicates that the digital environment has a significant influence on adolescents' mindset, social preferences, and behavior remaja (Maula & Ulya, 2025) (Agyapong-Opoku et al., 2025).

Furthermore, social media also holds great positive potential if used wisely by adolescents (Isabella & Agustian, 2023). Digital platforms serve not only as a means of entertainment but can also be an effective learning tool. Through social media, adolescents can access various educational resources, such as academic materials, skill-building tutorials, and inspirational content that supports both academic and non-academic development (Costa & Oliver, 2025).

Furthermore, social media plays a role in fostering adolescents' creativity. The various features available enable them to create content such as writing, videos, graphic designs, and other artistic works. These activities not only cultivate creative thinking skills but also boost self-confidence and communication skills. In this context, social media can serve as a platform for teenagers to express themselves in a positive and productive manner (Dhingra & Parashar, 2022).

Furthermore, social media provides opportunities for adolescents to participate in broader digital communities. They can discuss, share ideas, and voice opinions regarding various issues emerging in society. This demonstrates that social media does not only have negative impacts but also plays a crucial role as a tool for self-development, broadening perspectives, and enhancing adolescents' social skills when used appropriately and responsibly (Sharma, 2014).

However, excessive use of social media continues to create serious challenges for adolescents. Exposure to age-inappropriate content, cyberbullying, online exploitation, and digital addiction has become increasingly prevalent among school-age youth (Falcón-Linares et al., 2023; Welsey-Smith & Fleming, 2025). These problems not only affect adolescents' psychological well-being but also contribute to increased stress, anxiety, reduced social empathy, and declining face-to-face communication skills (Winarko H, 2021; Alina Ali Zani et al., 2025; Payasi & Jain, 2025). From the perspective of Islamic education, these phenomena indicate the weakening of character values such as self-control, responsibility, modesty, and ethical behavior in digital interactions. Although previous studies have extensively discussed the psychological and social impacts of social media use, most have focused primarily on behavioral consequences rather than examining how government intervention policies can be connected to character education frameworks. Moreover, studies that specifically analyze social media age-restriction policies through the lens of Islamic character education remain scarce. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive study that not only examines the impacts of social media use but also evaluates policy responses and their relevance to Islamic character development among adolescents.

Efforts to address these issues require the involvement of various stakeholders. Digital literacy is a key strategy in shaping adolescents' behavior to use social media more wisely (Dienlin & Johannes, 2020) (Dedi Gunawan Saputra et al., 2025). Families, schools, and the community share the responsibility of providing guidance, supervision, and education on moral values regarding technology use. Effective collaboration among these parties is expected to create a healthy and safe digital environment for adolescents (Agustin & Rahayu, 2025).

In the policy context, the Indonesian government has issued Ministerial Regulation on Communication and Digital Affairs No. 9 of 2026 as an effort to protect children, particularly adolescents under the age of 16, from the risks of social media use (Nasyomia & Pradana,

2026). This policy emphasizes restricting access to age-inappropriate content, preventing cyberbullying, and controlling digital addiction (Kaur & Saukko, 2022). However, research integrating this policy with an Islamic character education perspective remains limited. In the policy context, the Indonesian government has issued Ministerial Regulation of Communication and Digital Affairs No. 9 of 2026 as an effort to protect children and adolescents from the risks associated with social media use (Nasyomia & Pradana, 2026). The regulation emphasizes age restrictions, protection from harmful content, prevention of cyberbullying, and mitigation of digital addiction (Kaur & Saukko, 2022). Nevertheless, existing studies generally discuss social media impacts, digital literacy, or adolescent behavior separately, while limited attention has been given to examining government age-restriction policies from the perspective of Islamic character education. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach that connects three dimensions simultaneously: the impacts of social media use among adolescents, the implementation of age-restriction policies, and the values of Islamic character education as a framework for evaluating those policies. By combining these perspectives, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how regulatory measures can contribute to strengthening adolescent character development in the digital era.

. Therefore, the research questions in this study are: (1) what is the impact of social media use on adolescents? (2) what are the government policies regarding age restrictions on social media use? and (3) how can these policies be analyzed from the perspective of Islamic character education? This study aims to analyze the impact of social media, examine government policies, and evaluate them from the perspective of Islamic character education.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using a literature review approach. Qualitative descriptive research was selected because it enables researchers to explore, interpret, and describe social phenomena comprehensively based on existing literature rather than numerical data. The literature review method was used to collect and analyze various scholarly sources relevant to social media use among adolescents, government policies on social media access restrictions, and Islamic character education (Syahza, 2021). Data sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and SINTA, academic books, government regulations, policy documents, and other credible publications related to the research topic. The selected literature was limited to publications that discussed adolescent social media behavior, digital literacy, character development, and educational perspectives on digital technology. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media use, government regulation, and Islamic character education.

This study does not directly involve a population or sample because all data used are secondary data obtained from various scientific literature. The selected literature was chosen based on topic relevance, source credibility, and its contribution to the discussion regarding social media use, adolescent development, and character education from an Islamic perspective. Data collection was conducted using a documentation technique. The process involved several stages. First, the researcher searched for relevant literature through academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, SINTA, and official government websites. Second, the identified sources were screened based on relevance to the research objectives, publication credibility, and recency of publication. Third, the selected documents were read thoroughly and important information related to social media impacts, age-restriction policies, and Islamic character education was recorded systematically. Fourth, the collected data were

classified into several thematic categories to facilitate analysis. This documentation technique enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive and relevant data from various authoritative sources.

Data were obtained from journal articles, books, and policy documents, which were then selected based on relevance, recency, and source credibility (Zed, 2014).

The research procedure was carried out in several stages. The first stage involved identifying and collecting various literature relevant to the research focus. The second stage involved classifying data sources based on specific themes, such as social media use, adolescent behavioral development, and character education. The third stage involved systematically analyzing the literature to identify patterns, concepts, and relationships among variables related to the research. The final stage involved compiling the analysis results in a descriptive and systematic manner in accordance with the research objectives (Rapia Arcanita, Guntur Putrajaya, Idi Warsah, 2023).

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher themselves (human instrument), supported by tools such as documentation notes and literature analysis sheets. The data analysis technique used is content analysis with a qualitative approach. The analysis process involves data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to yield findings that are relevant and aligned with the research focus (Ahmad, 2025)

The evaluation in this study was conducted qualitatively by assessing the extent to which the concept of restricting social media access can be understood and interpreted from a character education perspective. The indicators of research success were determined based on the depth of analysis, the interrelationship between concepts, and the relevance of the findings to the research objectives that had been formulated.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Result***

#### **1. Remaja The Impact of Social Media Use on Adolescents.**

Based on a review of the literature from various scientific sources, several studies indicate that more than 70% of adolescents actively use social media every day and spend more than 3 hours per day on digital platforms (A'yun, 2021). Social media use among adolescents has become an inseparable phenomenon from daily life in the digital age. Social media serves not only as a means of communication but also as a space for social interaction that shapes new behavioral patterns among adolescents. In this context, adolescents utilize social media as a medium to interact with peers, expand their social networks, and establish their online presence within an increasingly evolving digital environment.

Based on a literature review of various relevant scientific sources, it was found that social media use among adolescents has become an inseparable phenomenon from daily life in the digital age (Aulina, 2018). The rapid development of information and communication technology has driven changes in societal lifestyles, particularly among adolescents who tend to be more adaptable to new technologies. Social media now serves not merely as a supplement but has become a central component of adolescents' daily activities, ranging from communication and information-seeking to leisure time.

Social media functions not only as a communication tool but has also evolved into a dynamic and complex space for social interaction. Within this digital space, adolescents can interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds without being constrained by physical space or time. This pattern of interaction facilitates the formation of social connections, yet it also brings changes in how teenagers build

relationships, where communication no longer relies entirely on face-to-face meetings (Sert et al., 2026). This indicates a shift in communication culture from conventional to digital.

In a broader context, social media also plays a role in shaping new behavioral patterns among adolescents. The way adolescents speak, think, and respond to various social phenomena is heavily influenced by the content they consume on social media. The evolving digital culture such as viral trends, concise communication styles, and the need to constantly maintain a presence in digital public spaces indirectly shapes adolescents' character and habits. This situation indicates that social media is not merely a tool but also a socialization agent with significant influence on the development of social behavior (Agarwal et al., 2020)

Additionally, adolescents utilize social media as a medium to interact with peers, expand their social networks, and establish their sense of self within an increasingly evolving digital environment (Anggraeni, 2019)). They tend to use social media as a means to express their identity, gain social recognition, and boost their self-confidence through the interactions that occur within it. These activities reflect adolescents' psychological need to be accepted and recognized within their social groups, both in the real world and in the virtual world, which ultimately influences how they view themselves and their surroundings.

Research findings indicate that social media plays a crucial role in adolescents' psychosocial development, particularly in the aspect of identity formation (Auliya & Yanda, 2025). During this developmental phase, adolescents are in the stage of self-exploration, where they begin to understand who they are, what values they hold, and how they wish to be perceived by others. The presence of social media provides a vast space for adolescents to engage in this process more openly and diversely.

Social media serves as an effective platform for adolescents to express themselves through various forms of content, such as text, images, and videos. Adolescents tend to present the self-image they wish to build in the digital public sphere, whether in terms of personality, interests, or lifestyle (Asadullah, 2018). This process not only reflects a need for self-expression but also indicates a desire to gain social recognition from their surroundings.

In practice, interactions occurring on social media also influence the formation of adolescents' self-concept. Responses in the form of comments, the number of likes, and other forms of appreciation serve as social indicators that can influence self-confidence and self-assessment. This situation indicates that social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' self-perception, both positively and negatively, depending on the experiences they gain through these digital interactions. Responses in the form of comments, likes, and other forms of appreciation serve as social indicators that can influence self-confidence and self-perception. This suggests that social media plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' self-perception both positively and negatively depending on the experiences they gain through these digital interactions.

On the other hand, widespread access to information through social media also provides great opportunities for adolescents to broaden their horizons and develop their potential. Various educational, inspirational, and interactive content allows adolescents to expand their knowledge, foster creativity, and strengthen communication skills through dynamic and flexible forms of digital interaction (Avci et al., 2025). This

suggests that social media can serve as a productive tool in supporting adolescent development when used appropriately and responsibly.

However, the study's findings also reveal that uncontrolled social media use has the potential to cause various negative impacts (Rosita et al., 2022). Adolescents in an emotionally unstable developmental stage tend to have limited self-control, making them more vulnerable to excessive social media use (Prawiro & Purbaningrum, 2021). This condition can trigger the emergence of digital addiction, dependence on social validation, and a tendency to spend time unproductively on online activities (Pazer, 2024).

Additionally, several studies indicate that excessive social media use is correlated with an increased risk of stress and anxiety among adolescents, reaching approximately 60% among active users (Reich, 2025), and represents one of the primary risks associated with social media use by adolescents. Various easily accessible negative contents can influence adolescents' thought patterns, attitudes, and behaviors, both directly and indirectly (Aulina, 2018). In some literature, this condition is also linked to an increased risk of psychological disorders, such as stress and anxiety, as well as a decline in the quality of face-to-face social interactions due to the dominance of digital-based communication (Reich, 2025).

Furthermore, excessive social media use also disrupts the balance of adolescents' daily activities. Time that should be spent on studying, interacting with family, and participating in social activities in the real world is significantly reduced. This indicates that social media not only affects social and psychological aspects but also impacts adolescents' overall academic development and time management.

## 2. Policies on Age Restrictions for Social Media Use

Based on an analysis of various policy documents and related literature, it was found that the Indonesian government has taken strategic steps to regulate social media use through Minister of Communication and Digital Affairs Regulation No. 9 of 2026. This policy is a response to the rise of various issues in the digital space, particularly those related to protecting children and adolescents from the risks of uncontrolled social media use (Nurjamin, 2026).

The study's findings indicate that more than 50% of countries have begun implementing age restrictions on social media access as a form of child protection (Reddy et al., 2023). This policy focuses on restricting social media access, particularly for children and adolescents under the age of 16. These restrictions are based on the consideration that at this age, individuals are still in a stage of cognitive, emotional, and social development that is not yet fully mature. Therefore, special protection is needed to ensure they are not freely exposed to various digital content and interactions that could potentially have a negative impact on their personal development (Scholar & Street, 2020).

The primary objective of this policy is to minimize the various risks that may arise from uncontrolled social media use. These risks include exposure to age-inappropriate content, such as violence and pornography; cyberbullying, which can impact mental health; and social media addiction, which can disrupt learning activities and real-world social interactions. With age restrictions in place, it is hoped that adolescents will be better protected from these threats, allowing their growth and development to proceed optimally.

Furthermore, this policy also reflects the government's efforts to create a safer, healthier, and more youth-friendly digital environment for the development of children and adolescents (Pallavi Rai, Chandra Shekhar, 2025). The government acts not only as a regulator but also as a protector striving to ensure that the digital space is utilized positively. This policy is expected to encourage awareness among various stakeholders, including families, schools, and the community, to participate in monitoring and guiding adolescents in using social media wisely and responsibly.

Furthermore, research findings indicate that this policy has a preventive nature, emphasizing efforts to prevent negative impacts before they become more serious (Simanjuntak, 2024). In this context, age restrictions on social media access are not merely viewed as administrative regulations but also as a protective strategy focused on the psychological and social aspects of adolescents in the digital age (Roche & Flynn, 2020).

However, the study's findings also reveal that the implementation of this policy still faces various challenges in practice. One of the main obstacles is the low level of digital literacy among the public, particularly among parents who play a crucial role in monitoring their children's social media use (Lou et al., 2024). Additionally, the ease of access to various digital platforms and the weakness of monitoring systems also hinder the policy's effectiveness.

This situation indicates that although the policy has been well-designed conceptually, its implementation still requires support from various stakeholders to function optimally. Without synergy between the government, families, and educational institutions, the objectives of the age-restriction policy for social media use will be difficult to achieve to the fullest extent (Abrori et al., 2024).

### 3. The Urgency of Age Restrictions from a Character Education Perspective

Based on the results of a literature review, it was found that age restrictions on social media access are of high urgency in supporting the character education process, particularly from the perspective of Islamic character education. In this context, education focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the development of character, encompassing students' attitudes, behaviors, and overall self-control. A character education survey indicates that approximately 65% of teachers believe social media contributes to a decline in students' discipline and moral values (Mulyono, 2021)

This indicates that uncontrolled social media can affect the process of internalizing moral values among adolescents. Exposure to various digital content that does not align with character education values has the potential to hinder the development of moral character, particularly in terms of responsibility, honesty, and self-control. This situation indicates that social media has a significant influence on the formation of adolescents' behavior in daily life (Marzuki & Sudrajat, 2026)

Additionally, it has been found that the fast-paced, instant, and minimally regulated nature of social media can influence how adolescents think, behave, and make decisions. This poses a unique challenge in the character education process, as the values instilled through formal education often do not align with the realities adolescents face in the digital space (Jazimatussoimah, 2024)

Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that age restrictions on social media access can serve as a preventive strategy to ensure the character-building process remains aligned with Islamic educational values (M.Arif Khoiruddin, 2016). Such

restrictions help minimize early exposure to inappropriate digital content, thereby allowing the internalization of values to proceed in a more focused and optimal manner. Thus, age restrictions on social media access should not only be understood as a form of regulation but also as an effort to provide moral and psychological protection for adolescents. This indicates that such policies play a crucial role in supporting the success of character education in the digital age, which is fraught with challenges.

## **Discussion**

### **1. Analysis of the Impact of Social Media on Adolescents**

The findings of this study reinforce the view that social media plays a dual role in the lives of adolescents: as a means of self-development and as a source of risks that can affect their psychological and social development (Paper, 2025). On the one hand, social media provides a space for adolescents to learn, interact, and develop their potential through various digital activities. On the other hand, exposure to inappropriate content, social pressure, and negative interactions can also impact adolescents' thought patterns, emotions, and behavior in their daily lives (Tiala, 2020).

From the perspective of adolescent development theory, this aligns with the characteristics of the adolescent phase, which is marked by identity exploration (Samsidar, 2024). At this stage, adolescents are more easily influenced by external environments, including the highly dynamic digital environment. They strive to discover their true selves by trying out various roles, following trends, and adapting to evolving social expectations on social media, making the influence of the digital environment increasingly powerful in shaping their personalities.

Meanwhile, within the context of social learning theory, adolescent behavior shaped through social media can be explained through the process of observing and imitating the content they consume. Adolescents tend to mimic behaviors perceived as attractive, popular, or receiving positive feedback from the digital environment. This process occurs continuously and can influence their habits and ways of thinking. Therefore, the quality and type of content accessed are critical factors in shaping adolescent behavior patterns (Wal et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the negative impacts identified in research findings indicate that a lack of self-control is one of the primary factors exacerbating the risk of excessive social media use. This highlights the importance of strengthening self-regulation in adolescents so they can use social media wisely and responsibly.

### **2. Analysis of Social Media Age Restriction Policies**

Social media age restriction policies can be understood as a form of government intervention aimed at reducing the risks faced by adolescents in the digital space (Carcelén-garcía et al., 2026). Theoretically, this policy is part of a preventive approach in public policy aimed at protecting vulnerable groups from the negative impacts of technological advancements. This preventive approach emphasizes efforts to prevent issues before they escalate into more complex problems, such as psychological disorders, behavioral deviations, or exposure to content inappropriate for adolescents' developmental stage. In this context, age restrictions are not merely a form of access restriction but also a protective strategy designed to ensure that adolescents possess the necessary cognitive and emotional readiness before actively engaging in the vast and boundless digital space.

However, research findings indicate that the effectiveness of such policies is not determined solely by the existence of regulations but also heavily depends on societal readiness to support their implementation. Low levels of digital literacy among parents, educators, and even adolescents themselves represent a major obstacle to the implementation of these policies. Furthermore, weak supervision both within the family and in the community highlights a gap between the policies designed and the realities on the ground (Reddy et al., 2023). This situation indicates that without adequate understanding and active involvement from various stakeholders, the formulated policies risk failing to function optimally.

Therefore, more comprehensive efforts are needed, such as improving digital literacy, strengthening the roles of families and schools, and establishing an effective monitoring system, so that this age restriction policy can be implemented to the fullest extent and have a significant impact in protecting adolescents in the digital age.

### 3. Analysis from the Perspective of Islamic Character Education

From the perspective of Islamic character education, the cultivation of moral character is the primary objective that is inseparable from the entire educational process. Education is not directed solely at achieving cognitive aspects but also emphasizes the development of attitudes and behaviors consistent with Islamic values. Values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and self-control serve as crucial foundations in shaping students' well-rounded personalities that maintain a balance among intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects (Giwangsa et al., 2022). The process of internalizing these values requires consistent practice, positive role modeling from the surrounding environment, and ongoing supervision so that these values are not only understood in theory but are also reflected in students' daily behavior.

Research findings indicate that social media can pose a challenge in the process of internalizing these values, particularly due to its inherently free, open, and not fully controlled nature. Adolescents who lack maturity in self-control are at risk of being influenced by various negative content and interactions that contradict Islamic moral values. This situation can hinder the character-building process and even risk behavioral deviations if not balanced with appropriate guidance. In this context, age restrictions on social media access can be understood as a form of preventive protection for adolescents, ensuring they are better prepared to navigate the dynamics of the digital world. Such policies also create space for character education to function more effectively, enabling adolescents to grow into individuals capable of self-control and behaving in accordance with moral values and Islamic teachings (Ardian Al Hidayat et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the concept of self-control in Islam is highly relevant in addressing the challenges of the digital age. Age restrictions serve not only as rules but also as part of an educational strategy aimed at shaping individuals capable of self-control and acting in accordance with moral values (Sarkadi et al., 2020). Thus, age restrictions on social media access play a strategic role in supporting the success of Islamic character education in the digital age. However, this success heavily depends on the synergy between families, schools, and the community in creating an environment conducive to adolescent development.

Furthermore, the family, as the primary environment, plays a central role in instilling values of self-control from an early age. Parents serve not only as supervisors

but also as role models in the wise use of social media. Consistent guidance, open communication, and clear boundaries will help adolescents understand what is good and bad in the digital world. Thus, age restrictions on social media access will be more effective if supported by appropriate parenting practices within the family (Rahmasari et al., 2024).

On the other hand, educational institutions and society also bear the responsibility of strengthening adolescents' character (Abrori et al., 2024). Schools can integrate Islamic-values-based digital literacy into the learning process, so that students are not only technologically savvy but also possess good moral conduct when interacting in the virtual world (Qa'iriyah & Qumaira, 2025). Meanwhile, society needs to create a positive and supportive social environment so that adolescents are not influenced by negative content. Strong synergy among these three elements is key to fostering a generation capable of facing the challenges of the digital age while remaining grounded in Islamic values.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that social media use has complex effects on adolescents, both positive and negative, particularly in psychological, social, and character-building aspects. Social media can serve as a tool for self-development, but it also carries potential risks such as digital addiction, exposure to harmful content, and impaired self-control. Furthermore, age restrictions on social media access are of high urgency as a form of preventive protection in the digital age and are relevant from the perspective of Islamic character education to strengthen moral values. Therefore, synergy between the government, families, and educational institutions is needed to improve digital literacy and supervision of social media use, so that the character development of adolescents can proceed optimally and adapt to technological advancements.

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