

The Credibility of Websites as a Source of News for the Communications Officer in the Algerian Electronic Newspapers: An Exploratory Study.

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Abstract:

News reporting is continuously increasing, witnessing a radical transformation with the increased use of the internet among readers of electronic newspapers and news websites across different sectors. This transformation has necessitated the need to reassess several concepts, including but not only the concept of credibility with its traditional and modern criteria. Among the major reasons behind studying this concept is the growing competition between media institutions, as well as the presence of news websites affiliated with radio stations such as the BBC or satellite television stations like Al Jazeera, which has already contributed to capturing the attention of the Algerian audience.

Keywords: The Credibility, Websites, Electronic Newspapers.

مصداقية المواقع الإلكترونية كمصدر للأخبار لدى القائم بالاتصال في الصحف الجزائرية
الإلكترونية: دراسة استطلاعية.

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تشهد صناعة الصحافة تحولاً جذرياً يتنامي يوماً بعد يوم مع ازدياد انتشار استخدام شبكة الأنترنت وسط قطاعات عريضة من جمهور قراء الصحف الإلكترونية والمواقع الإخبارية المتاحة على الشبكة، وقد فرض هذا التحول الحاجة إلى إعادة اختبار مفاهيم عدة منها على سبيل المثال لا الحصر، **فمفهوم المصداقية (Credibility)** بما يحتويه هذا المفهوم من معايير تقليدية وأخرى مستحدثة، وربما يكمن السبب وراء دراسة هذا المفهوم إلى تنامي حالة التنافس بين المؤسسات الصحفية، فضلاً عن وجود مواقع إخبارية إما لمحطات إذاعة مثل (BBC) أو لمحطات تلفزيونية فضائية مثل الجزيرة، والتي أسهمت بالفعل في الاستحواذ على انتباه الجمهور الجزائري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المصداقية - المواقع الإلكترونية - الصحف الإلكترونية

Introduction:

News reporting is continuously increasing, witnessing a radical transformation with the increased use of the internet among readers of electronic newspapers and news websites across different sectors. This transformation has necessitated the need to reassess several concepts, including but not only the concept of credibility with its traditional and modern criteria. Among the major reasons behind studying this concept is the growing competition between media institutions, as well as the presence of news websites affiliated with radio stations such as the BBC or satellite television stations like Al Jazeera, which has already contributed to capturing the attention of the Algerian audience.

In fact, the simultaneous spread of news websites on the net has corresponded with a decrease in the number of readers of printed newspapers. This latter comes as a result of the decrease in the cost of internet connection on the one hand, and the increase in the cost of printing newspapers on the other hand, which led, from time to time, to financial crises in media institutions. Consequently, having daily editions of those online newspapers on the net became necessary, although they do not contain the detailed journalistic content as found in the printed newspaper. This is compensated for by using hyperlink systems to obtain additional information about the news, in addition to saving articles in archival files that can be easily browsed through the network and the newspaper's website. This development may raise an important question about the credibility of these printed newspapers and their counterparts available on the internet because the future credibility of news websites is linked to anticipating the prospects of development in usage and how that affects the media content, as well as how the Algerian audience perceives the relationship between the credibility of these websites and print journalism.

Problem Statement and Significance of the Study

The use of the net by the Algerian audience is persistently increasing as it contains various available news websites. This raises questions about the diversity of sources for obtaining news and information, as well as the increasing interactivity with the medium, whether it be the internet itself or the source of information. This plurality and interactivity have raised an important question about the credibility of news websites, considering the extent to which the audience relies on and accepts this new pattern of information retrieval. Attempting to answer this question may reveal a problematic aspect in testing the relationship between the credibility of news websites and the future of print journalism and its development prospects amidst tremendous technological advancements. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the relationship between the credibility of news websites and the future of print journalism in light of the aforementioned concepts and through an integrative theoretical approach, aiming to address the issue from multiple perspectives.

Research Questions:

1. How does the Algerian audience see news websites credibility?
2. What are the characteristics of news websites which differentiate them from print journalism?
3. What are the different standards of news websites credibility?
4. To which extent is the credibility of news websites related to demographic factors?

Theoretical Framework :

This study is theoretically grounded in some theories, approaches, and concepts that align with the nature of the study's subject. The researcher relies on the theory of mutual dependency between media and social systems. Through this theory, the study starts from the perspective and approach of individual dependence on the media (Media Dependency). The importance of using this approach lies in its dependence on achieving specific goals for the audience as a result of using information sources, including cognitive goals. Therefore, this approach constitutes the basis for understanding the variables related to the impact of media messages on beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. (1)

The uses and gratifications theory has also been utilized for its theoretical framework, which aids in discussing the study's topic. As McQuail illustrates in his

discussion of the uses and gratifications model, this theory serves as a framework through which media can be studied within social and cultural contexts. The essence of this approach lies in the relationship between the audience and how they use media, and the extent to which this reflects on cognitive and behavioral aspects. This approach allows the audience to select and discuss the content of media and its implications. (2)

One of the important concepts that explains many aspects of this study is the concept of dependency. This concept elucidates the patterns of the use of media by the audience. Ball Rokeach and DeFleur argue that media means achieve various goals for individuals when the audience's dependency on these means increases. However, the degree of dependency depends on the extent of access to this medium, the social and cultural acceptance of that medium as a source of information, as well as the level of interest in the media content it produces. Moreover, the availability of multiple media outlets allows for choice and selection among them.

Since the study topic relates to the audience's use of the internet, it is necessary to employ the concept of interactivity. Interactivity is an inherent feature of new digital journalism. This concept can be used to examine and test credibility standards in news websites and compare them with the future of print journalism.

Literature Review :

Reading about numerous Arabic and foreign journals, distinguished by the diversity of their research orientations, methodologies, topics, and approaches to addressing them, the researcher will be able to classify them as follows:

The first group comprises academic studies in the form of master and doctoral theses, as well as peer-reviewed scientific research. Among these studies is, for example, the study by Azza Abdelaziz Abdullah, which addressed the credibility of Egyptian journalism “nationalist and partisan”. It examined the content, communication process, and audience during the 1990s era. The researcher utilized survey as a research tool, comparative approaches, and case studies to understand the impact of subjective and objective factors on Egyptian journalism. The researcher identified credibility criteria focusing on integrity, confidence, and plurality. (3)

Meanwhile, the second study is by Maha Abdelmadjid Saleh. It is a master dissertation intitled “the Egyptian audience use of the daily electronic newspapers

on the net”- an analytic and field study. Moreover, the researcher described the types and forms of the Egyptians use of electronic newspapers and the extent to which the audience rely on them through examining the demographic variables and studying the characteristics of presenting and writing the news content. Additionally, the researcher presented audience expectations and forecasts, applying both the structural and behavioral approach to studying the audience. The researcher relied on the interactive and material updating criteria as two fundamental factors in evaluating the efficiency of the news website. (4)

Among the studies that addressed the present and future of Egyptian and Arab electronic journalism is the study by Najwa Abdul Salam Fahmi. This study involved numerous comparisons between print journalism and electronic journalism in terms of advantages, tools, and services provided by electronic journalism. The researcher utilized a media survey methodology, both descriptive and analytical, especially qualitative analysis of Egyptian electronic newspaper websites and some Arab newspapers. (5)

In contrast to previous studies that focused on credibility and electronic journalism, there is a need to clarify two studies that focused on the audience and the future dimension of modern communication technology. Perhaps what prompted the researcher to highlight these two studies is the first study focus on the issue of freedom of expression available on the internet and how that could affect the growing credibility of news websites. The second study focus was on monitoring audience trends towards a new media pattern, namely, paid television. This topic might seem unrelated to the discussion, but choosing the future dimension was the driving force behind making this study.

As for the second study, it is titled “Paid Television: Its Reality and Future Trends in Egypt - A Survey Study of Audience Trends.” In this study, Sami Abdul Aziz presents the reality of this new media tool and ways to forecast its development prospects by studying the audience's awareness of it, their attitudes towards it, and their behavioral intentions regarding subscribing to it. (6)

All in all, the most important results from the previous studies can be summarized as follows:

1. The audience credibility definitions differ based on what they follow and content quality.

2. The audience tend to use electronic journalism because of many positive factors like the easiness of use, the presence of visual and broadcast news material, in addition to the variety of services provided by news websites on the internet.
3. The audience's increase of the other non-Egyptian news websites when it comes to the news credibility.
4. The audience look for an instant information source.
5. There is a growing interest in discussing Arab-related issues on the internet.
6. The growing number of channels and so their websites on the net increase which leads to the variety of information sources. Thus, this latter creates a sort of competition between print journalism and the online one.

As for the studies in **the second group**, they included foreign studies published in specialized scientific journals on media research and audience studies. The research topics related to credibility and new media varied in these studies, and this will be further elucidated below.

Kiousis in his study discussed credibility as one of the determinants used by the audience when following new media in the information age. He compared the credibility of news sourced from television, newspapers, and the internet. The researcher also addressed two important variables: media use and patterns of personal communication and their role in discussing the credibility of the medium. Additionally, he focused on source and content credibility. The researcher used a media survey methodology with a random sample and enlisted a team of media students trained in research procedures. Among the most significant findings of this study are:

- The credibility of news on the internet is higher than its counterparts on television.
- Digital news websites reshape audience attitudes towards the credibility of traditional media. (7)

As for the study by Metzger and Flanagin, it aimed to measure public attitudes towards credibility patterns on the internet compared to radio, television, magazines, and newspapers. The researchers found that internet credibility equals that of the aforementioned media except for printed newspapers, which have higher credibility ratings. Metzger and Flanagin relied on verification criteria, content, and editorial review as governing elements to discuss credibility issues. They used a media survey

methodology. Finally, the researchers raised several future aspects related to source credibility, media content diversity in the context of media pluralism, the evolution of standards and mechanisms for verifying media credibility, as well as identifying trends and new theoretical frameworks to address credibility issues. (8)

Among the recent studies that may open up a wide field for discussing the issue of credibility is the study by Kaye and Johnston regarding the reliance on traditional and new media and its impact on the credibility of so-called “Weblogs” or news blogs. These have begun to proliferate and are not digital journalism in the conventional sense; rather, they are news diaries where any internet user can establish a website and present a specific topic for public discussion, thus fostering interactive contexts in discussing the presented news. The results of this study showed that this new pattern provides deeper news coverage compared to traditional media. Additionally, the survey showed that the sample individuals rely on these blogs as credible sources due to the absence of control by authorities, governments, or pressure groups in disseminating daily news. (9)

The study by Althus and Tewksbury discussed the differences in information acquisition between readers of printed daily newspapers and readers of instant newspapers on the internet. In their experimental study, the researchers found that readers of instant newspapers have the ability to control the selection of news content but do not have the ability to remember what they have been exposed to during browsing. The importance of the results of this study lies in reshaping the reading pattern of newspapers as a reaction to the creation of news websites on the internet. Additionally, it highlights the possibility of the emergence of a category of audience for instant journalism that is aware of various topics lacking in other audiences. Furthermore, it underscores the presence of journalistic innovations related to newspaper design and methods of presenting news materials using multimedia. (10)

Methodological Framework:

Based on the theoretical framework relying on the individual's reliance on media and their uses and gratifications, and considering the aspects of the research problem addressing credibility through studying the audience and public issues, fragmentation, and collectivity, the main objectives of the study can be identified as follows:

1. The relationship between the credibility of news websites and the future of print journalism in the Egyptian audience eyes.
2. Anticipating the future of print journalism within the Algerian society.
3. Identifying the most important characteristics and criteria of credibility for news websites on the internet.

To achieve these goals, given that this is an exploratory survey study, the researcher needs to specify its type, methodology, research instrument, as well as variables. Through this study, the researcher attempts to address a future-oriented issue related to monitoring the relationship between the proliferation of news websites and their credibility on one hand, and the relationship of this phenomenon with print journalism and its future on the other hand.

Therefore, a survey methodology will be used with a purposive sample of Algerian internet users. This study will analyze the characteristics of credibility for news websites and explore the future of print journalism in light of this analysis.

Sample of the Study:

The researcher used a purposive sample from 250 Algerian internet users, with a response rate of 88.4%, totaling 221 respondents. The reason for choosing this type of sample is the limited prevalence of internet usage among Algerian audiences.

The research, which relied on a structured questionnaire, yielded several results. The researcher addressed basic demographic data in the questionnaire to explain audience characteristics. This was followed by a series of questions aimed at providing a description of the use of news websites, taking into account respondents' inquiries about the credibility criteria of these websites. Additionally, the study selected study variables.

Table 01. *The Sample Characteristics*

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
1- Type		
● Female	120	54.3 %
● Male	101	45.7 %

2- Age Average: 25 years old		
3- Income Average: 35000 DA		
4- Occupation		
• Administrative	31	14.02%
• Educational	111	50.2%
• Technical	5	2.3%
• Artistic	13	5.9%
• Commercial	32	14.5%
• None	29	0.5%
5- Academic Level		
• Higher Education	10	4.5%
• University	178	80.5%
• High School	32	14.5%
• Not mentioned	1	0.5%
6- Speaking Foreign Languages		
• Yes	170	77%
• No	51	23%
7- Controlling Computer:		
• Yes	44	20%
• No	177	80%
8- The Average Number of Use Hours: 2.5 hours per day		

It is noted that the questionnaire mostly consisted of closed-ended questions, with some open-ended questions left to allow for analysis of respondents' qualitative answers. The second part of the questionnaire focused on understanding the audience's awareness of news websites on the internet, their usage patterns, and the

frequency and reasons for visiting and navigating these websites. The following table illustrates the most important statistical proportions provided:

Table 02.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage%
9- Consulting Websites		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No 	164 57	74.3% 25.7%
10- Not consulting: preferring television channels	57	25.7%
11- Consulting Websites:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Daily ● Weekly ● From time to time 	73 69 22	44.5% 42% 13.5%
12- Importance of websites:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Algerian Newspapers ● Arab Newspaper ● El Djazira Newspaper ● BBC Website 	50 70 30 11 3	30.5% 18.3% 42.7% 6.7% 1.8%

The most significant aspect highlighted by Table (2) is the number of news website browsers (164), making this frequency the reference point. The remaining questions are entirely dependent on browsing news websites. It is revealed that 25.7% do not follow news websites because they prefer watching satellite TV

channels for news. Additionally, the results indicate that the website of Al Jazeera satellite channel has the highest responses, followed by Algerian newspapers' websites in particular.

In the third part of the questionnaire, the researcher focused on discussing the credibility of news websites in terms of criteria and comparing them with print journalism. Therefore, several metrics were developed, including comprehensiveness, clarity, diversity, objectivity, accuracy, immediacy, content quality, and interactivity, to measure audience attitudes towards the credibility of news websites. A comparison was also made between the future of print journalism and the growing use of these websites.

The following table summarizes the results,

Table 03.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage%
13- The content of the	news websites:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● No ● Do not know 	121 38 5	73.18% 23.2% 3%
14- News websites more journalism	credible than print	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes ● Do not know 	89 65	54.3% 39.6%
16-Websites affect the journalism in Algeria:	credibility of print	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Negatively ● Positively ● Do not affect ● Do not know 	53 89 15 9	32.3% 54.3% 9.2% 4.2%

18- Evaluating the credibility of news websites:		
• Very objective	55	33.5%
• Objective	63	38.5%
• Neutral	9	5.5%
• Not exact	37	22.5%
• Not exact at all	Zero	Zero
a. Its news		
• Very exact	65	39.6%
• Exact	48	29.3%
• Not exact at all	2	1.1%
b. Its news		
• Very fast	93	56.7%
• Fast	0	0
• Not fast	5	3%
• Not fast at all	0	0
c. Its content		
• Very good	97	59.2%
• Good	51	31.2%
• Not good	2	01.1%

Among the most important variables which make the difference between print journalism and news websites journalism is the interactive variable. This variable gives the researcher many options when discussing the credibility issue. In this vein, the table below presents some respondents' answers.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage%
19-Interaction with the content of the news websites through:		
• Navigating the text	128	78%
	17	10.4%

● Contacting editors	0	0%
● Adding content	13	8%
● Searching in Archive	6 0	3.6% 0%
● Using lives and discussions		
Total	164	100%

Results Discussion

This study aimed to answer several research questions related to the attitudes of the Algerian public, who are users of online news websites, towards the credibility of these websites. It also aimed to identify the criteria for this credibility and the characteristics and features of these websites that distinguish them from print journalism.

First, the results of the statistical analysis indicated that the audience of users of news websites, which included Algerian, Arab newspapers, television stations, and radio websites, rely on these websites to obtain news. Moreover, this audience perceives these websites as more credible than printed newspapers, with 54.3% of the sample expressing this view, compared to 39.6% who rejected it, and 6.1% who refrained from expressing their opinion. Perhaps the reason for asserting that these websites have higher credibility is the variety of options available to users of these websites. Consequently, they have a diverse media content available to them, allowing them to compare and determine which media outlets are more credible for them. This may even lead to reshaping the audience's attitudes towards the credibility of print journalism in the future.

Second, the study aimed to describe and monitor the key characteristics and features of news websites that may distinguish them from printed newspapers. In light of this, there are factors that make news websites more distinctive in terms of uniqueness compared to printed newspapers. For example, news websites greatly benefit from technological innovations in designing the format and structure of news content. Additionally, they utilize multimedia technologies that allow for visual and auditory broadcasting, as seen on websites like Al Jazeera and BBC Radio online. Furthermore, news websites specialize in having an electronic archive that allows users to access previous issues and search for past topics.

Third, there was a need to define the criteria for the credibility of news websites, and these criteria did not differ much from those used in traditional media. However, they included several additions such as immediacy, interactivity, and ease of use. Perhaps these criteria distinguish news websites from traditional media, which unite in their credibility criteria with those websites on basic attributes such as content quality, accuracy, good formulation, clarity, and objectivity.

The study resulted in multiple credibility criteria for news websites, making these sites more credible than print journalism. This leads us to answer the fourth question.

Forth, the researcher turned towards determining the future direction of the audience's preference regarding print journalism and found that the sample of respondents was divided into two groups. For example, 32.3% perceive a negative impact of these news websites, indicating a possibility of a 30% decrease in the distribution of printed newspapers, as stated in the study's results. On the other hand, 54.3% of the respondents expressed a positive outlook, suggesting a potential increase in news website users by 66%. Only 4% expressed complete reliance on such news websites.

Fifth, the researcher attempted to elucidate the relationship between demographic factors and the credibility of news websites. One of the most significant findings regarding this relationship is the relatively young age of the user demographic of these websites. Perhaps the reason for this is the inclusion of a sample of users who are university students or graduates, as evidenced by the proportion of respondents in the educational field. However, users from other professions varied in their proportions and specialties, ranging from administrative to technical to commercial fields.

It was also noted that the research sample includes a significant number of individuals proficient in foreign languages, particularly English, which facilitates easy browsing of non-Arabic websites. However, there was a decrease in the ownership of personal computers among the sample, with 80% stating they do not own a computer and instead rely on internet cafes or friends for computer access. This may partly explain the overall decrease in the total hours of computer usage to two and a half hours per day. It is worth considering the high cost of purchasing a computer, as well as the high electricity consumption costs compared to the relatively lower cost of internet connectivity, which represents a significant

economic factor to consider if we aim to reach a critical point in the number of users of these websites relative to the total population of Algeria.

Contrary to the study's initial inquiries, the current study included several objectives, among which was to monitor the relationship between the credibility of news websites and the future of print journalism. In light of this, it is notable that there was a higher percentage of individuals who relied on the credibility of news websites compared to those who rejected this credibility. To test their understanding of credibility, a scale was formulated consisting of criteria such as objectivity, accuracy, immediacy, and content quality.

Statistical analysis showed the superiority of news websites over print journalism except for the last criterion, which is content quality. The chi-square test indicated no clear statistical evidence confirming that the content of news websites is significantly better than that of print journalism. This point appears crucial when considering the future of print journalism, which still stands out for the quality of content provided to the audience due to adherence to professional journalistic practices that may be lacking in online news, which might prioritize immediacy over well-crafted content.

The study aimed to identify the key features of news websites, and the results revealed that interactivity is the most important characteristic of these websites, whether they are newspapers, radio, or television websites. Users can interact by navigating through the text, accessing subheadings as they wish, and quickly contacting the editor. Additionally, users can contribute content, as seen with users of news blogs. The significance of this result lies in the freedom to use news websites as a platform for expressing opinions without any restrictive practices faced by print journalism or traditional media.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Study Results:

One of the most significant features of new media is researchers' interest in studying their relationship with the audience. These media have introduced new patterns and innovative practices in the field of media, prompting communication scholars to explore the emerging relationships between audience use of these media and their potential effects. Our current discussion revolves around the concept of credibility, as defined by Burgoon, which is a multidimensional concept linked to standards of trust, responsibility, and reliance. (11)

This observation highlights the evolving nature of media dynamics and the need to understand how new media platforms intersect with audience perceptions and behaviors. By examining the multifaceted nature of credibility within the context of new media, researchers can gain insights into how audiences engage with and trust information disseminated through these platforms. This underscores the importance of the ongoing research to adapt to the changing media landscape and its implications for audience-media interactions. (12)

However, there are other factors that influence the spread of new media among the public, as outlined by Sedman, which include marketing the new medium and its specifications, as well as the extent to which it meets market needs. Therefore, we can test these factors to demonstrate the relationship between the proliferation of news website usage and the future of print journalism in Algeria. We will find that there are numerous obstacles that limit the widespread use of the internet by a significant portion of the population. Additionally, the high economic cost of acquiring a personal computer constitutes a significant barrier that contributes to understanding the future relationship between print journalism and online news websites. (13)

From a research perspective, new media should focus on freedom of expression, meaning that these platforms should be accessible to all sectors of the public without any restrictions. Hence, it is important to discuss the issue of credibility in the near future, especially if we find that print journalism still faces some limitations. This makes online news websites a potential future alternative due to their freedom of expression. However, challenges remain regarding the spread and distribution of these websites' services to all segments of the Algerian journalism audience, which remains a subject of inquiry. (14)

In addition to the aforementioned points, the future relationship between news websites and print journalism is determined by the public's perception of the standards and journalistic practices that have been instrumental in assessing the credibility of the new media platform. This was revealed by a study conducted by the National Press Club in the United States, where participants in the communication field emphasized the necessity of establishing standards and journalistic principles for the operation of news websites. Perhaps this could help enhance the credibility of such websites in the future. (15)

The statistics of this study have highlighted that keeping up with media evolution is imperative. However, envisioning the future aspect of the relationship between print journalism and news websites may appear challenging for several reasons:

- ✓ Firstly, it can be argued that print journalism will not vanish entirely but rather may witness a decline in readership.
- ✓ Secondly, the media industry in Egypt faces a challenge posed by the increasing cost of rapid technological advancements. This makes the element of media competition a defining factor for the future of both traditional and new media on a regional, not just local, level.

All in all, Algerian media face the challenge of competing on a wider scale beyond just the local audience. This necessitates a reevaluation of performance standards and professional practices in journalism, radio, and television. The element of competition has become evident with the world shifting towards what resembles a global village, especially with the proliferation of satellite channels that have given rise to news websites such as Al Jazeera and BBC, as examples. (16)

Conclusion:

The current research focused on testing the relationship between the credibility of news websites and three main propositions: credibility, the diversity of news content, and the audience's cognitive levels. This was approached from theoretical perspectives such as individual reliance on media and their uses and gratifications. The study's results indicated that the content of news websites is of similar quality to that of print journalism. Additionally, a positive correlation was observed between the audience's internet usage knowledge level and their inclination towards the credibility of these websites. This correlation was evident through the audience's interaction with these websites.

Regarding future implications, both negative and positive trends were identified. While there is an increasing usage of news websites, they cannot be entirely relied upon. Conversely, the negative trend highlighted the declining distribution of printed newspapers.

Lastly, a point for future research discussion could be the future of press freedom in light of the clear expression of freedom of expression through news websites, manifested in dialogue spaces and interactive forums. This issue may

become a focal point for the audience, especially considering the rising production costs of printed newspapers and the growing reliance of the audience on news websites as credible sources, as indicated in the current study and numerous other communication research studies.

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