



A Comprehensive Review of Fake News Consumption on Social Media Among Nigerians

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ABSTRACT

Social media is the 21st-century media that has given every user an equal opportunity to publish news without passing through any form of gatekeeping, editorial, or professional scrutiny. Combating the spread of fake news remains a difficult problem. For this reason, it is increasingly urgent to understand the phenomenon of fake news. The study focused on “reviewing the consumption of fake news on social media among Nigerians” Hinged on Conspiracy Theory, findings showed the proliferation and success of fake news are associated with its characteristics (more surreal, exaggerated, impressive, emotional, persuasive, clickbait, shocking images) seem to be strategically thought out and exploited by the creators of fake news. Thus, fake news distorts, manipulates and falsifies facts to make the subject more surreal, bizarre, surprising and controversial, and these aspects motivate the sharing by users. The study therefore recommends that government should fast track its plan to regulate the use of social media to reduce the spread of fake news consumption in our society. More so, it was recommended People should be taught how to do research correctly and find the truth if they have read something online that has no reliable sources.

Keywords: Fake News, Media consumption, Social media, Online

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of social media platforms has revolutionized the consumption of news, reshaping the way information is disseminated. In today's digital age, individuals encounter a plethora of online content on social media, much of which, regrettably, lacks accuracy. The rapid sharing of news by acquaintances, followers, or even strangers occurs within mere seconds. The contemporary communication landscape has shifted from traditional mediums such as letters, radio, television, newspapers, and telephones to the realm of new media, primarily comprised of social networking sites and mobile phones.





Since the creation of social media, the increase in the amount of deceptive information on these platforms has been a major problem. Alarms have been raised by the vast amount of false information that is spreading on the internet. Recent occurrences, most notably the COVID-19 epidemic, have made people less confident in the veracity of information shared on social media. Misinformation increased during the epidemic, leading to misunderstanding and a decline in public confidence (Karina, 2018). With implications for evidence-based decision-making on a variety of societal issues, such as international relations, vaccinations, and climate change, the unchecked spread of "fake news" and misinformation online now poses a serious threat to the democratic process (Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook, 2017; Van der Linden, et al., 2017; Poland and Spier, 2010; Lazer et al., 2018).

The quick spread of fabricated information on the World Wide Web in Nigeria not only undermines public confidence but also presents health risks that can occasionally result in fatalities or serious injuries. According to a 2019 survey by Newman, 33% of Nigerian internet users primarily get their news from Facebook, outperforming conventional media sources. Younger groups are most affected by this trend, with 52% of 18 to 24 year olds depending on Facebook for news updates. (Newman, 2019). Deka (2021) expressed worry that, despite the social networking site's near-ubiquity in our culture, relying on it for trustworthy information is not always wise.

Three separate concepts—misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information—are frequently combined in fake news. False information that is spread and taken for granted when it is communicated is known as misinformation. Conversely, disinformation refers to the deliberate dissemination of incorrect information while being aware of its errors. Information that is true but meant to harm people, groups, or nations is seen as mal-information.

Fake news is created when disinformation is spreads, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Fake news is made up stories that lack credible sources, facts, or quotations. These stories aim to mislead or alter readers' perceptions (Deka, 2021). Facebook and Twitter are to blame for the dissemination of misleading information on the internet, since they employ subdivided groupings or predictive algorithms to do so (Zimma, 2019).

A number of strategies have been put forth to deal with this problem; these include adding digital media literacy to the curriculum in schools (Council of Europe, 2017; Select Committee on Communications, 2017), using machine learning algorithms to automatically verify rumors (Roy, 2017), and doing fact-checks in real time (Bode, 2017). Decades of studies on human cognition, however, show that individuals tend to hold onto disproven myths despite the fact that correcting misinformation is difficult and frequently useless (Nyhan and Reifler, 2012). Notably, present study demonstrates that falsehood spreads swiftly and broadly than accurate information (Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral, 2018). Therefore, it's possible that creating better debunking and fact-checking tools alone won't be enough to stop the spread of false information online (Chan et al., 2017; Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook, 2017).

A growing number of researchers, like Lewandowsky (2018) and Mohseni and Ragan (2018), are investigating proactive techniques to address disinformation because of the difficulties with reactive ones. This study aims to prevent false narratives from becoming ingrained in the public memory. Specifically, it looks at the dissemination of fake news and its effects on the country.

This study fills a vacuum in the body of knowledge by undertaking an extensive review of the topic. Mass media researchers typically experience difficulty in developing acceptable methodological and theoretical frameworks to evaluate internet consumers' behavior and shifting views surrounding

unethical journalism practices (Borah, 2017, 2011; Neuman and Guggenheim, 2011). Moreover, recent studies have focused on the creation of recommendation algorithms with the goal of reducing confirmation bias and diversifying material (Mohseni and Ragan, 2018). Still, not much focus has been placed on the structural features of false news. By examining fake news from the viewpoint of the consumer, comprehending the characteristics that propel its viral dissemination, and pinpointing elements linked to the choice and ingestion of false news in an online setting, this review seeks to add to the body of literature.

Background

Fake News: A Conceptual Explanation

The term "fake news" lacks a universally accepted definition, leaving room for misinformation, satire, and fabricated content. While broadly understood as misleading information presented as genuine, scholars, including McGonagle (2017) and Alawode, Olorede, and Azeez (2018), offer nuanced perspectives. McGonagle defines fake news as deliberately fabricated information intended to deceive, akin to disinformation and hoaxes. Alawode, Olorede, and Azeez characterize it as intentionally false news crafted to mislead, emphasizing falsehood and deceptive intent.

Acknowledging human fallibility, the need arises to differentiate inadvertently false content from intentionally deceptive fake news. Claire Wardle, as referenced in Ogbette, Idam, Kareem, and Ogbette (2019), identifies six types of fake news, urging consideration of nuances and motivations. The discernible elements of fake news, then, revolve around the falsehood of content and the intent to deceive or mislead.

The categorization of fake news involves recognizing various forms, each with distinct characteristics and intentions:

- a. **Satire or Parody:** This form lacks the intent to cause harm but possesses the potential to mislead. It involves humorously mimicking genuine news.
- b. **False Connection:** In this type, headlines, visuals, or captions are incongruent with the actual content, creating a misleading impression.
- c. **Misleading Content:** This form employs information in a misleading manner to frame an issue or an individual, distorting the reality of the situation.
- d. **Imposter Content:** Genuine sources are impersonated with false and fabricated sources, leading to a deceptive presentation of information.
- e. **Manipulated Content:** Authentic information or imagery is manipulated to deceive, often seen in doctored photos or videos, altering the original context.
- f. **Fabricated Content:** In this category, news content is entirely false, crafted with the explicit purpose of deceiving and causing harm, presenting a significant risk of misinformation.

Based on the preceding analysis, it is evident that fake news manifests in diverse forms, ranging from relatively harmless to potentially harmful. This recognition is crucial when addressing 'fake news' as a societal issue. Consequently, we define fake news as intentionally manipulated or fabricated information or news content strategically disseminated with the purpose of inducing anxiety, stirring unrest, inciting, and causing harm on an individual or community level.

Fake News Consumers: Who Are They?

A number of important factors have been identified by new research on the choice and use of disinformation online, including mistrust of traditional media (Swift, 2016; Nielsen and Graves, 2017), educational attainment (Pop and Ene, 2019; Flynn et al., 2017), demographics (Shu et al., 2018b; Tanțău et al., 2019; Manalu et al., 2018), political affiliations (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Uscinski et al.,



2016; Rini, 2017), time spent on social media (Nelson and Taneja, 2018), and cognitive abilities (Pennycook and Rand 2017, 2019).

Spending too much time on social media, particularly for politically involved users, has been associated to an increased dissemination of fake news (Halpern et al., 2019). Although more connected users may exhibit higher expertise and expose themselves less to deception (Halpern et al., 2019). Some study indicates a lesser audience for false news compared to actual news, which contradicts the notion that social media use directly corresponds with acceptance of fake news (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Guess et al., 2019). Facebook is still the most popular social network for accessing news, therefore even with its lower readership, it has been crucial in spreading false news, particularly during political events (Bernal, 2018; Newman et al., 2019).

The relationship between the amount of time spent on Facebook and Google and the intake of false news indicates a favorable correlation between users' social media access and their consumption of fake news (Nelson and Taneja, 2018). Education levels also affect the acceptance of and spread of fake news; those with higher levels of education, particularly those in their youth, are less likely to spread misleading information (Pop and Ene, 2019; Flynn et al., 2017). Gender disparities play a role, with women more inclined to trust rumors (Lai, 2020), and less educated persons demonstrating a higher propensity of believing in rumors (Lai et al., 2020). Belief in false rumors is linked to personality qualities such as neuroticism and extroversion (Bordia and DiFonzo, 2017; Lai et al., 2020). Quantitative and instinctive approaches to thinking affect the assessment of erroneous or accurate data, with persons leaning toward intuition more likely to believe in disinformation, especially when confined to reading headlines (Gabelkov et al., 2016; Pennycook and Rand, 2019). Susceptibility to false news can be influenced by political ideology, especially conservatism, as conservatives tend to depend more on intuition (Pennycook and Rand 2019a; Swire et al. 2017; Deppe et al. 2015). According to Munger et al. (2018), clickbait titles that draw attention to information that is of questionable value or interest are typically preferred by older persons.

Use of and Distribution of (Fake) News on Social Media

The advent of new media has brought about significant transformations in global journalism, reshaping the traditional practices of the profession. The interactive nature of new media platforms has turned news consumers into active content creators, a phenomenon termed 'produsage,' breaking down traditional barriers to news production. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have amplified this shift, influencing journalistic practices, professional identities, and content distribution. While new media has enhanced audience engagement and participation, it has also posed challenges to authentic news dissemination. Platforms including Twitter and Facebook, with their peer-to-peer distribution model, have disrupted traditional information dissemination approaches, resulting to the increasing transmission of erroneous, deceptive, and propagandistic content masquerading as news (Posetti, 2018).

The interactive dynamics of social media have transformed the landscape of news consumption and production. While journalists and media organizations actively use these platforms to generate and distribute news, the rise of filter bubbles or echo chambers has limited exposure to diverse views and verified information (Posetti, 2009; Posetti, 2013).

The norm of sharing news on social media, including platforms like WhatsApp, has democratized news consumption and production. However, this democratization comes with risks, as false information, including fake news, is disseminated at scale, raising concerns about its impact on national security (Posetti, 2018).



In this digital age, social media platforms play a dual role as both reliable sources and channels for the spread of fake news. User motivations for sharing news on these platforms vary widely, from seeking social approval to ideological beliefs, party affiliations, and the desire to inform friends. Understanding these motivations is crucial for comprehending the persistent spread of fake news on social media, as engagement metrics serve as credibility criteria influencing the selection, production, and dissemination of news topics (Delmazo and Valente, 2018; Salgado and Bobba, 2019).

The Primary Drivers of False News Spreading

The use of social media for news sharing is a common habit driven by things like people's curiosity about hot-button issues. This is consistent with the incentives seen in the dissemination of fake news, which propagates conspiracy theories and distorts the truth (Polletta and Callahan, 2019). Sensational headlines and emotive language are hallmarks of fake news, which plays on emotions to increase its spread—content that arouses strong emotions is more likely to be shared (Vosoughi et al., 2018; García-Perdomo et al., 2018).

News sharing is influenced by social connections and the desire to improve one's social status, which strengthens one's position as "informed." On the other hand, disseminating false information might harm social standing and personal connections (Duffy et al., 2019). Another incentive that causes anxiety and pushes people to look for acceptance and inclusion is the fear of missing out (FoMO) (Alt, 2015; Talwar et al., 2019).

Incorrect or controversial details are more likely to be shared if it corresponds with the user's pre-existing opinions, stressing the political and ideological components in the transmission of false news (Uscinski et al., 2016; Marwick, 2018). Social media platforms contribute to the development of misleading information through recommendation algorithms and media characteristics (Bernal, 2018; Zimmer et al., 2019a).

Fake News and Nigeria's Struggle Against Insurgency

In Nigeria, propagation of false information has adverse consequences that go outside the military, influencing politics and escalating already-existing societal divides. Every day, false information is spread, targeting various groups and taking advantage of characteristics like political opinions, religious affiliations, and ethnicity (AFP, 2019). While the military faces difficulties in combating insurgencies due to fake news, the political arena is also susceptible to the destabilizing effects of false information. Political and religious divides are increasingly recognized as major elements contributing to the spread of misinformation in Nigeria, where false news has historically targeted ethnicity (AFP, 2019). According to allegations that it demoralizes officers, damages the military's reputation, and helps organizations like Boko Haram spread propaganda via social media, the Nigerian military must deal with the real repercussions of false news (Usman, 2018). The military has repeatedly urged the mainstream media to assist in curbing the spread of false information, especially on social media sites like Facebook and WhatsApp.

Communication channels have become fertile grounds for the dissemination of misleading information, harming national security and presenting a threat to social cohesiveness (Adebajo, 2020). Acknowledging the gravity of the situation, the Nigerian Army and the Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria have collaborated to combat the problem of fake news, particularly in relation to the ongoing insurgency (El-Kurebe, 2019). Pre-existing tensions have been heightened by the unparalleled amounts of disinformation in Nigeria.



A video showing Hausa farmers applying pesticide on beans that has been making the rounds on social media serves as an example. Fake news contributed to the misreading of this film, which in turn caused long-standing hostilities between the Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups to worsen. False claims that the farmers were dispersing poison rather than pesticide were made as a result of the deception, underscoring the potential for fake news to spark conflicts and widen social divisions (Hassan and Hitchen, 2020).

In essence, the multifaceted impact of fake news in Nigeria is evident in its ability to compromise military efforts, fuel political tensions, and contribute to social discord. Countering this menace requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including the military, mainstream media, and governmental organizations, to mitigate the far-reaching consequences of misinformation (AFP, 2019; Usman, 2018; Adebajo, 2020; El-Kurebe, 2019; Hassan and Hitchen, 2020).

The Effect of False Information on Nigeria's COVID-19 Vaccination Rates

Nigeria has one of the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates in Africa, with only 10% of the population fully vaccinated as of October 2023 (NCDC, 2023). This low vaccination rate is attributed to a combination of factors, including vaccine hesitancy, logistical challenges, and a lack of access to vaccines (Abdullah et al., 2021; Ezugwu et al., 2022). However, the pervasiveness of fake news about COVID-19 vaccines has also played a significant role in discouraging vaccine uptake.

Fake news about COVID-19 vaccines has been circulating in Nigeria since the beginning of the pandemic, spreading through various channels, including social media, messaging apps, and even traditional media outlets (Onyeador et al., 2021; Onuoha et al., 2022). This misinformation often includes unfounded claims that the vaccines are dangerous, ineffective, or part of a global conspiracy, leading to widespread fear and distrust among the Nigerian population (Adegboyega et al., 2021; Oguneye et al., 2022).

The Nigerian government has launched several campaigns to promote COVID-19 vaccination, emphasizing the safety and efficacy of the vaccines (NPHCDA, 2023). However, these efforts have been hampered by the persistent spread of fake news, which has eroded public trust in health authorities and made it difficult to counter the prevailing misconceptions (Adigun et al., 2022; Eke et al., 2023).

To address the challenge of fake news hindering COVID-19 vaccination rates in Nigeria, a comprehensive strategy encompassing multiple initiatives is imperative. Firstly, promoting media literacy emerges as a key component. This involves empowering Nigerians through educational programs, public awareness campaigns, and integrating media literacy education into school curricula, thereby fostering critical thinking skills and the ability to evaluate information (Onuoha et al., 2022; Adigun et al., 2022).

Another crucial facet involves holding social media platforms accountable for the content shared on their platforms. Stricter content moderation policies, the development of algorithms to identify and flag fake news, and collaboration with fact-checking organizations are recommended measures (Ezugwu et al., 2022; Onyeador et al., 2021). This emphasizes the significant responsibility these platforms bear in curbing the spread of misinformation.

Supporting independent journalism is identified as a vital strategy in providing accurate and reliable information. This not only counters misinformation but also contributes to informed decision-making.



Strengthening the media landscape through support for independent journalists and news organizations is crucial in combating the proliferation of fake news (Oguneye et al., 2022; Abdullah et al., 2021). The implementation of robust fact-checking mechanisms is highlighted as essential for timely and accurate debunking of fake news. Investing in fact-checking organizations and supporting their efforts to verify information and counter misinformation is deemed crucial for building public trust (Eke et al., 2023; Adegboyega et al., 2021).

Increasing transparency in government communication emerges as a critical factor in countering fake news. This involves sharing data and information publicly, addressing concerns openly, and engaging in regular dialogue with communities. Such transparency aims to foster trust and reduce the spread of misinformation (NPHCDA, 2023; NCDC, 2023).

Furthermore, building trust with communities is integral. Engaging with communities, understanding their concerns, and tailoring public health interventions to local contexts are emphasized. Community engagement not only addresses misinformation but also overcomes vaccination barriers and promotes informed decision-making (Onyeador et al., 2021; Onuoha et al., 2022).

The Effect of False Information on Nigeria's 2019 Presidential Election

The 2019 Nigerian presidential election, a closely contested battle between President Muhammadu Buhari and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, witnessed widespread violence, voter intimidation, and allegations of electoral malpractice (Olatunde, 2019; Owolabi & Salawu, 2019). Fake news is believed to have played a significant role in fostering fear, distrust, and political polarization during the election (Ogbodo, 2020; Oguejiofor, 2020).

Both campaigns were accused of using false news on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp in the run-up to the election. Fabricated tales, doctored photographs, and edited films spread to denigrate the other candidate and affect voter behavior (Ogbodo, 2020; Oguejiofor, 2020). A particularly damaging fake news story falsely claimed that Abubakar intended to sell Nigeria to a foreign country if elected, contributing to violence on election day despite later being debunked by fact-checkers (Olatunde, 2019; Owolabi & Salawu, 2019).

The use of fabricated information during the Nigerian election highlights how dangerous it can be in a democratic setting since it may cause division, erode public confidence, and incite violence. The ease with which fake news can be shared on social media and the speed at which information can be shared online have made this deceptive strategy evident in elections throughout the globe, including those in the US, Brazil, and India (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2020).

Addressing the fake news problem requires concerted efforts such as promoting media literacy, holding social media platforms accountable, and supporting independent journalism (Ogbodo, 2020; Oguejiofor, 2020). Strategies for identifying and countering fake news are crucial, along with building public trust in institutions responsible for providing accurate information (Allers & Botha, 2020; Vos & Van der Loo, 2018). These steps aim to create a more informed and resilient society less susceptible to the perils of fake news.

Empirical Review

The function of mass media as information providers during emergencies and major national events has been discussed in-depth by experts in the subject. Fake news usually thrives during campaigns, major



national or international events, and times of crisis. Media outlets have a responsibility to provide in-depth coverage and updates on relevant problems in order to meet the public's information needs. Apuke and Omar's (2020) investigation examined the motivations behind the spread of false information during the COVID-19 pandemic epidemic in Nigeria. The main driving force for the dissemination of false information on COVID-19 was found to be altruism. According to the study, social media users were motivated by a desire to educate others who might not be aware of critical health facts that could endanger their wellbeing. However, the study found a notable lack of authenticity checking prior to online information dissemination, which likely contributed to the spread of false information during the epidemic.

The effects of fabricated information on society, especially in the social media age, were examined by Ngwainmbi (2018). Despite noting the multiple positives coming from technology improvements in new media, the research underlined the problems, with the transmission of incorrect and misleading information being a notable worry. Ngwainmbi (2018) distinguished between established and developing nations as she examined the effects of false news on nation-building. The results indicated that although developed countries share fake news more frequently because portable devices are easily accessed, poor countries share fake news more frequently because they have fewer tools available to distinguish between fake and true news. According to the study, people all around the world could be less likely to recognize false news since it is so interesting.

Banerjee and Haque (2018) concentrated on how fake news circulated throughout India and how politicians took advantage of it for their own gain. The study demonstrated how politicians in India used the threat of false news to spread hate speech across the nation. One such instance was the dissemination of a video in 2018 showing a sizable gathering commemorating Pakistan's cricket triumph in India, along with a false narrative implying that Indian Muslims were betraying their country. In India, isolated crises were brought on by this false information.

According to Yaraghi (2019), false information on social media degrades confidence and reduces global knowledge, making it a negative part of modern society. The study highlighted how online businesses neglected to fact-check material before releasing it, which led to the creation of automated and manual processes for content promotion, editing, and filtering. The survey found that many consumers now turn to these metrics as their main source of information.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a library research approach to collect data, with the majority of the sources coming from already published works. To obtain the data, secondary sources were used. Essentially, textbooks, journals, magazines, and internet resources were used to collect the data.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of theoretical frameworks is to provide context and clarification for ideas by comparing problems with accepted theories so that they may be examined theoretically. The Conspiracy theory offers a fundamental framework for this investigation. By proposing covert conspiracies by powerful individuals, conspiracy theories attempt to explain the underlying causes of noteworthy socio-political events or situations (Keeley, 1999, as quoted in Douglas, Uscinski, Sutton, Cichocka, Nefes, Ang, and

Deravi, 2019). This viewpoint includes strong individuals or organizations in addition to governments. According to McKenzie-McHarg (2018), who was quoted by Douglas et al. (2019), there are two types of conspiracies: those that entail a proven causal sequence of events and those that are merely allegations of conspiracy that might or might not be real. There are situations in which people have certain opinions about a problem, which are referred to be "conspiracy beliefs." Enders and Small page (2018), for instance, report that over 60% of Americans think the CIA was involved in John F. Kennedy's killing. Similarly, in Nigeria, a considerable number of individuals believe in the conspiracy that the country is being run by Jibrin Al-Sudani, a man from Sudan, following the alleged death of Muhammad Buhari in 2017.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

According to recent study, misinformation websites tend to reach a smaller audience than legitimate news sources, indicating that fake news has a restricted reach. Nevertheless, this does not reduce the relevance or deleterious impacts of fake news, especially in the context of its proliferation on social media. An analysis of this review article shows that fake news purposefully uses a variety of features to draw readers in. These strategies range from how the item's title is presented to the language utilized overall. The primary goals of language used in false news material are persuasiveness, emotion, and simplicity.

Even while social media in particular has a clear impact on the spread of misinformation online, the production of false news is closely related to taking use of all the "opportunities" and benefits that social media platforms offer. Fake news, whether ideological or financially, depends on being widely disseminated. Fake news producers pay close attention to a number of variables that may encourage user consumption and dissemination, starting with the subject, language choice, publication title, and picture selection.

Several studies illustrate how the goals of regular media and fake news organizations are similar. In order to make the subject matter more exciting, weird, shocking, and controversial—aspects that appeal to consumers and encourage sharing—fake news purposefully distorts, manipulates, and falsifies facts. As a result, a fake story has a higher chance of going viral than a real one.

Furthermore, further research is also needed to determine the motivations behind the consumption and dissemination of bogus news. There is disagreement among empirical findings about the demographics and consumption of false news. On the other hand, motivating variables associated with political, ideological, and party connections are highly correlated with the belief in false news. Contradictory outcomes emerge in other research, despite some literature suggesting that the widespread exploitation of narratives linked with this ideology increases the possibility that right-wing individuals may believe false news.

Recommendation

The following are strategies for curbing the negative implications of fake news consumption the following are recommended

- Taking personal responsibility is like the first step in protecting our societies. We each need to act like our own editors.
- It's important to learn how to research properly and find the truth if we read something online without reliable sources.

- Newspapers and journals, the ones we can touch and read, build relationships with readers based on their good reputation.
- People could be encouraged to share things more responsibly, especially by sharing content that is true.
- To really decrease false information, we might need to change the online places that encourage and support sharing it.
- Checking facts and making sure news is true, plus teaching people how to do it, can be part of campaigns to help societies deal with the impact of fake news.
- Using tools to check if something is true is important. It helps stop the spread of fake news and builds trust in society.

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