INTERNET – TOURISM:
A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: Tourism, being a service trade, has inevitably had the same development in the virtual field. What reasons would have persuaded tourism companies to expand or to start a business in the virtual space? Here is an answer to this question that the article tries to decipher it, although the Internet world is full of offers, exciting, accessible.
E-tourism as well as E-commerce has grown with the boom of computer technology and the emergence of computer web pages. The premises of electronic commerce emergence are: the innovations in computing technology, the huge offline competition, the lower online costs, the speed of sale and purchase, the increased comfort of the buyer (no longer having to look in several stores, favourable elements capitalized by tourists, constantly running out of time or inspiration, the internet offering a wide range of offers with a simple click...
This article examines the complex relationship Tourism- Internet and mutual benefits they provide.
Keywords: Internet, tourism, relationship, online experience, computer technology.

Introduction

> *"Travel is about the gorgeous feeling of teetering in the unknown."*
> ***Gaby Basora***

In 2015, international tourist arrivals grew by 4.4% last year and reached a record 1.2 billion, announced the World Tourism Organization on Monday. Around 50 million more tourists (overnight visitors) travelled to international destinations last year, compared to 2014. 2015 marks the 6th consecutive year of above-average growth, according to the UNWTO, international tourist arrivals growing by 4% or more each year from 2010 onwards.[1] (Fig.1)

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1   http://www.horeca.ro/turism/4164-record-in-turismul-mondial-1-2-miliarde-de-turisti-internationali-in-2015.html
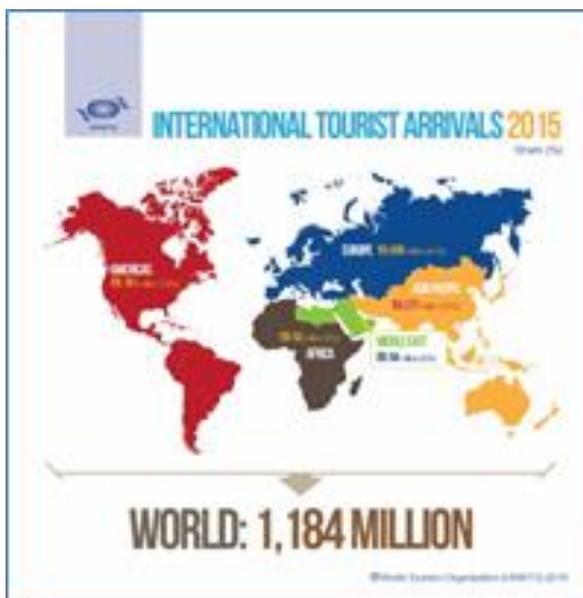
Fig. 1. International tourist arrivals in 2015
(Source: http: //media.unwto.org/infographics)

"*International tourism reached new peaks in 2015. The robust performance of the sector contributes to the economic growth and creates new jobs in many parts of the world. Thus, it is critical for countries to promote policies that encourage the continued growth of tourism, including facilitating travel, human resources development and sustainability*" Taleb Rifai, Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization.[2]

We have to add the same author's remarkable fact that "*2015 was influenced by exchange rates, prices for oil and natural or man-made disasters in many parts of the world. Because the current environment highlights the issues of safety and security, we should remember that tourism development largely depends on our collective ability to promote safe travel. In this regard, UNTO urges governments to include tourism administrations in their security procedures, structures and planning, to ensure that sector's exposure to risks is minimized,*" added Rifai.[3]

Fig. 2 Tourism participation in various sectors
(Source: http: //media.unwto.org/infographics)

2016 announces positive estimates, international tourist arrivals will show increases of 4% globally in 2016, and China, the US and UK undoubtedly lead the outbound tourism growth in 2015, but have supremacy among the countries with the highest tourism expenditures as well (fig. 3)

Fig. 3. Top countries with the highest expenditure in tourism

We can notice in the above-mentioned figure China, with a visible increase in expenditures, continuing to be the top leader in the world outbound tourism, but also the US, followed by other 2 European destinations: Germany and UK, followed by the Russian Federation.

In this context, we obviously wonder about the future of the tourist destinations? Do they have support capacity? Are they capable of meeting the online assault? Their environment is able to counteract the negative effects occurred in its functionality and balance?

E-commerce has grown with the boom of computer technology and the emergence of computer web pages. The premises of electronic commerce emergence are: the innovations in computer technology, the huge offline competition, the lower online costs, the speed of sale and purchase, the increased comfort of the buyer (no longer having to look in several stores).

Electronic commerce has taken deep root and developed in the United States because it has satisfied the American buyers' demands, due to the overcrowding of competing store, the consumer economy from America and the trend towards convenience of Americans.

Tourism, a service trade component with an actual profit, has inevitably had the same development in the virtual field. The operating methods of travel agencies are different in order to attract customers (table 1):

Table 1: Operating methods of travel agencies[4]

Method	Type	Features
Telephone call	One-to-one	Expensive, time consuming, extensive knowledge of languages
Fax:	One-to-one	Manual, time consuming, extensive knowledge of languages
Mail	One-to-one	Expensive, time consuming
Printed material	One-to-many	Very expensive, the information outdates very quickly
Email:	One-to-one / many	Manual, cheap, knowledge of foreign languages
Information Office	One-to-one	Expensive, knowledge of foreign languages
Website	One-to-many	Opened non-stop, may inform in several languages, the information is easily updated

Method Type Telephone call Features One-to-one Costly, time consuming, extensive knowledge of foreign languages Fax One-to-one Manual, time consuming, extensive knowledge of foreign languages Mail One-to-one Costly, time-consuming Printed materials One-to-many Very expensive, The information outdates very quickly E-mail One-to-one / many Manual, cheap, knowledge of foreign languages Information Office One-to-one Costly knowledge of foreign languages Website One-to-many Opened non-stop, may inform in several languages, the information is easily updated. The table above shows the possible methods for the sale of services by a travel agency. The "Type" column refers to the type of service or customer information (one-to-

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4 Adaptat după raportul "Mobile Services for Tourism"-2003- din cadrul programului Working Toghether for the Future of European Tourism, (p.27)

one - the company can serve one client through a selected method, one-to-many- the company can serve more clients through the selected method). The "Features" column refers to the major advantages and disadvantages of the selected method. We mention that the methods are ordered according to the frequency of use over time by travel agencies.

As we can see, the information and services offered and, especially, purchased by a travel agency are time consuming, costly - phones calls abroad - and require trained personnel, with knowledge of foreign languages. For example, booking a room at a hotel in Japan by a French agency requires a Japanese language speaking personnel, which increases the cost of salaries, plus expensive phone costs and a large amount of time - the booking, the confirmation, etc. Also this method is used only for one client and only one-more clients can be satisfied only by using a telephone office or a conference call - very expensive and very difficult to achieve.

The fax usage covers only meeting the demands of one client at a time (each client with his/her own number - more customers more numbers to dials), requiring the manual labour of writing which is time-consuming. Also, this method requires that travel agencies have personnel with knowledge of several foreign languages - costs with employees. Another method is the standard mail - letters. This method is the most time consuming and expensive communication method, this also requiring personnel with knowledge of foreign languages. However, this method is still practiced in countries with limited access to the Internet or countries where the population is reluctant to access the Internet. The printed material method is a hybrid of the mailing method, its advantages being the fact that the distribution of printed materials is easier. Other materials must be printed to present new information, leading to an increase in costs and time, the printed materials being, like other written forms, very rigid. The email method - sending information via email - is an effective method in terms of costs, the only disadvantage being that this involves employees with knowledge of foreign languages. Of course, there has been a boom of marketing via email, boom that is still felt today, because emails reach increasingly more potential clients, covering quickly different geographical areas and customers with different preferences. The laws and rules on email and virtual trade have recently appeared, these introducing the concept of SPAM Mail - unwanted, annoying and disturbing emails, this concept protecting the user from emails sent for the purpose of advertising and attraction towards the unwanted product or service. But this method has been the subject of controversy regarding its morality - upon its emergence, the ethical offline commerce laws did not apply in the virtual space, and together with the development and the boom registered, many companies have been questioned regarding their pursuit of immediate and safe profit from this method, without offering what they promised. The information office consists

of one or more strategic offices located usually by regional tourism directorates, aimed at guiding and helping the tourists with directions in the area. This information office can be a classic one - officials who give explanations, queues at counters, etc. - or can be a computerised one - computers that provide different information.

In both cases, this method is an expensive one - personnel costs, equipment, etc.; Moreover, the hired personnel must be able to provide information in as many languages as possible.

The website - is the cheapest method that covers a significant range of clients. This method can serve and inform more clients at the same time, making it effective in terms of time. Also, new information can be added easily on the website, the information and the offers being relevant and up to date. Another advantage of the website is that it is available non-stop for the tourist and in as many languages as possible, the pages in each language being easy and cheap to achieve, compared to the employment of three tourism operators, each knowing four languages. The conclusion is that with the development of technology, tourism companies must weigh the methods used to achieve the best possible ratio between the effectiveness of the method and the resources used. This report - with a fairly high value - represents the prerequisite for the emergence of e-tourism.

E.g.*, **The website -** is the most accessible and inexpensive method that attracts a significant mass of potential customers. This method can serve and inform more clients at the same time, making it effective in terms of time and quality of the updated information, being available non-stop for the tourist and in as many languages as possible, the pages in each language being easy and cheap to achieve, reducing agency costs considerably, no longer being required to ensure the linguistic proficiency of its own personnel.

The conclusion is that with the development of technology, tourism companies must weigh the methods used to achieve the best possible ratio between the effectiveness of the method and the operating methods used.

Another way to inform potential clients is the **tourism portal,** an information infrastructure of a business community, bringing together all the actors in tourism (tourism service providers, hostels, hotels, treatment facilities, travel agencies, consumers of goods and tourism services) in the virtual space, providing Internet and tourists' transparency and competitiveness. Offering complex services, permanently required by tourists, they can book their stay online, request the necessary information via email, with the opportunity to gain time, to pay everything online via credit card. Also regarding the direct bookings and the online bookings, according to the Eurobarometer 2011,[5] Romania has the highest index of growth in the EU, from 59% in 2009 to 77% in 2010 (+18%). The percentage may seem worrisome for travel agencies, but

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5 http://www.turismmarket.com/review-2011-ce-a-facut-piata-turistica-din-romania-in-2011

let's not forget that the concept of online in Romania is diluted: it does not relate to the whole procurement process (which should be purely online, from the documentation to the payment), but it most often refers to a mixed approach (online and offline). According to a big player in the online travel market, 90% of the tourists inform themselves online, but buy offline. Over 90% of the purchases are for the ticketing service.

Even online promotion has as starting point the Internet searches, complying for their mutual benefit with the following steps (Fig. 4):
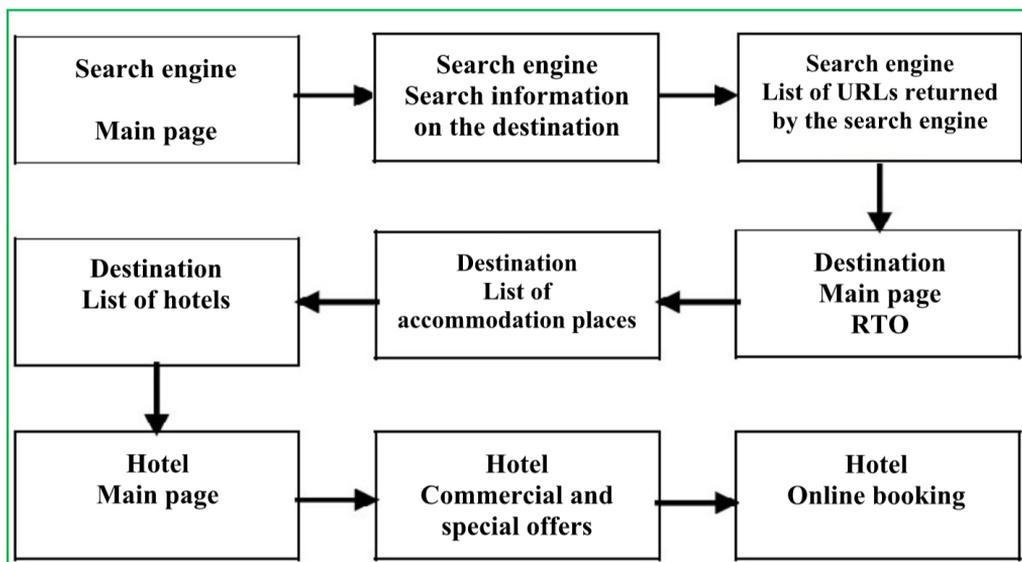

Fig. 4. Steps to book online
Source: Adapted from Bender, D., Using the Web to market the hospitality, travel and tourism product or service, 1997 (p. 78)

The Internet is an indispensable thing for many of us. But many of the citizens from the European Union (EU) countries have had no contact whatsoever with the online environment, the highest percentage being recorded in Romania.

Almost three quarters of the EU population has access to Internet, unlike in 2006, when only half of the Europeans had the necessary facilities to surf the Internet, according to a recent study by Eurostat. Romania ranks first in the number of people who have never had contact with the Internet. 54% of the Romanian population aged between 16 and 74 years have never used a computer. In this ranking, our country is followed by Bulgaria (46%), Greece (45%), Cyprus and Portugal (both 41%), while the lowest proportion was recorded in Sweden (5%).At EU level, the number of those who have never used the Internet fell from 42% in 2006 to 24% in 2015, according to Eurostat. Internet access has increased in the period 2006-2015, but there are still

significant differences between EU countries. The best in this respect is the Netherlands (94% of the population has Internet access), followed by Luxembourg and Sweden (91%).In Romania, two forms of tourism prospectively shape as a priority: **online tourism** and **niche tourism,** two directions towards which tourism focuses and the promotion of tourist destinations in Romania, although we will not neglect the useful contribution of travel agencies, ranking first the classic destinations practising mass tourism (e.g. stays at the seaside in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Turkey, etc.).

Tourist destinations adapt, forced by the information explosion, to the speed of their movements, to the social networks, to the mobile applications multiplied exponentially in the interest of tourists, which have become in time a source of inspiration for Internet surfing tourists. In addition, nowadays tourists have provided a large number of Internet tools for planning their trips such as: maps, travel guides, travel planning, flights, new search engine, tips and more.

E-tourism radically transforms the tourism industry because "E-Tourism, is the digitalization of all processes and value chains in tourism, travel, hospitality and catering industries, that enable organizations to maximise their efficiency and effectiveness" (D. Buhalis, 2003).

Tourism in web era highlights several strengths of the Internet and its contribution to the tourism development:

- ❖ The Internet offers tourism consumers the option of selection, interactivity, efficiency and forces them to make various comparisons (related to the quality of offers, prices, information and methods of early booking, last-minute booking, etc.).
- ❖ The Internet offers and demands quality and transparency from the consumer, while demanding from tourism stakeholders and employers to meet the virtual tourist market dynamics and to change the promotion strategy on the fly.
- ❖ Internet imposes competition and competence on the actors in tourism;
- ❖ The Internet, in addition to the primary attribute of commercial network, has gained over time the quality of a fast communication network, creating stable bridges, some with a real continuity between tourists and stakeholders;
- ❖ Internet determines new trends in tourism, tourist destinations development, in the quick methods of accessing and booking the desired holidays;
- ❖ Internet, like tourism, does not follow the rules of economy, the slogan "first come, first served" gaining more and more ground on the social networks flooded by those lacking inspiration in choosing the holiday destination.

Websites promoting tourism nationally:

- www.turist-in-romania.ro - The most comprehensive travel portal, hostels, villas, hotels, motels, campgrounds, balneal resorts, chalets. The website provides information about each county, tourist information, pictures of hotels, hostels. The possibility of promoting any tourist objective.

- www.romaniaturistica.ro - Romania Turistica is the most comprehensive online travel magazine. It offers an online information, documentation and tourism promotion centre; database of accommodation units, catering, travel agencies, images, tourist objectives, tourist trails, resorts, tourist localities, legislation; thoughts on holiday places, travels, trips, vacations, camps, weekends, articles about fishing, hunting, customs, traditions, folk customs. Tourism promotion - 100% Romanian tourism.

- www.turismrom.ro - This portal is intended as a collection of information about Romanian tourism. Within the portal you will find from general information about Romania, data about each county, to the possible tourist objectives and tourist trails that you can configure based on the information.

- www.turism.ro - Turism.ro is an online travel guide of Romania. It presents a multitude of information, both for the Romanian tourists, but mostly for foreigners who wish to visit Romania, the information being presented in five international languages.

- www.tourmanager.ro - The website addresses both to those who dream of an unforgettable holiday, as well as to guesthouses, hotels, travel agents who want to promote their services.

- www.rotravel.com - It provides information about hotels, travel agencies, Romania (places to visit, history, music)

- www.etur.ro - Tourist promotion nationally: etur.ro portal is dedicated exclusively to promoting tourism in Romania and accommodation throughout the country;

- www.destinatiituristice.ro - Destinatiituristice.ro is a relatively new website that aims at presenting Romania in terms of tourism, being useful to those interested in spending holidays in Romania.

- www.infoturism.ro - The portal provides information on: accommodation, tours, stays, transport both for holidays in Romania and abroad.

- www.romaniantourism.ro - It provides information on travel agencies, hotels, both in Romania and abroad.

- www.turistinfo.ro - The most visited website for accommodation in Romania, with over 5,000 units recorded and updated daily.

- www.best-tourism.com - Travel guide of guesthouses in Romania

- www.ruraltourism.ro - Promotion website of rural agrotourism guesthouses in Romania. This site is intended to facilitate direct contacts between tourists and hosts, providing a more accurate idea on possible holiday destinations. The

site provides a maximum of information on the conditions of accommodation, catering, prices and proposals for activities in the guesthouse or in the area.

- www.cazarelapensiune.ro - This portal promotes accommodation offers in guesthouses, villas and hotels in Romania. As part of the strategic project "Tourism Entrepreneur - Guesthouses in Romania".

Too few and too poorly professional remain the websites promoting Romania abroad, exhaustive being:- www.focusromania.com - It provides a rich palette of information about Romania, especially for foreign tourists wishing to visit Romania, the information being presented in English.

- www.romaniatourism.com - The site provides extensive information about Romania to the foreign tourists intending to visit it or just wanting to learn more about the culture, the traditions, the legends, the art and architecture, the medieval towns, the castles, the fortresses, the monasteries or about the tourist attractions offered by nature, the information presented being complete and illustrated by highly suggestive images. It is one of the most complex promotion websites for Romania's tourism abroad, the information being presented in English.

Conclusions

Tourism is a network business because it is based on a number of stakeholders for its ability to develop and deliver tourism products and services. The Internet can be a real source of marketing, but remains a utility like water or energy consumption. Despite some risks related to its access, the security of pages or people, without ignoring the risks of the Internet, such as sex tourism, abuse of children, etc., the Internet has no geographical boundaries, citizenship, is not interested in race or education... but we believe that the actual lack of education gives rise to the shortcomings of its uncontrolled, abusive access.

In the new era of tourism, with the determination of new business models, compatible with clients, the change of the tourism consumer's role and of the interoperable data sets open to innovation, tourism has, in parallel, new responsibilities before the one who demands and uses it.The global increases indicate the significant fact that tourism remains in first place on its participation in the global economy, including the forecasts made by the authorized body in the field, namely, the World Tourism Organization, for 2030, and, until then, the growth curve of international tourist arrivals is visible (fig. 3). Perhaps, along with the very large increases of tourists worldwide the forms of tourism, Internet engines, methods of access, of their selection will increase and diversify...Currently 51% of the world population, about 4 billion people use different forms of Internet, by the year 2017 the number of Internet

users will reach 3.6 billion, over 48% of the estimated population of the planet (7.6 billion people), according to the "Cisco Visual Networking Index ".[6]
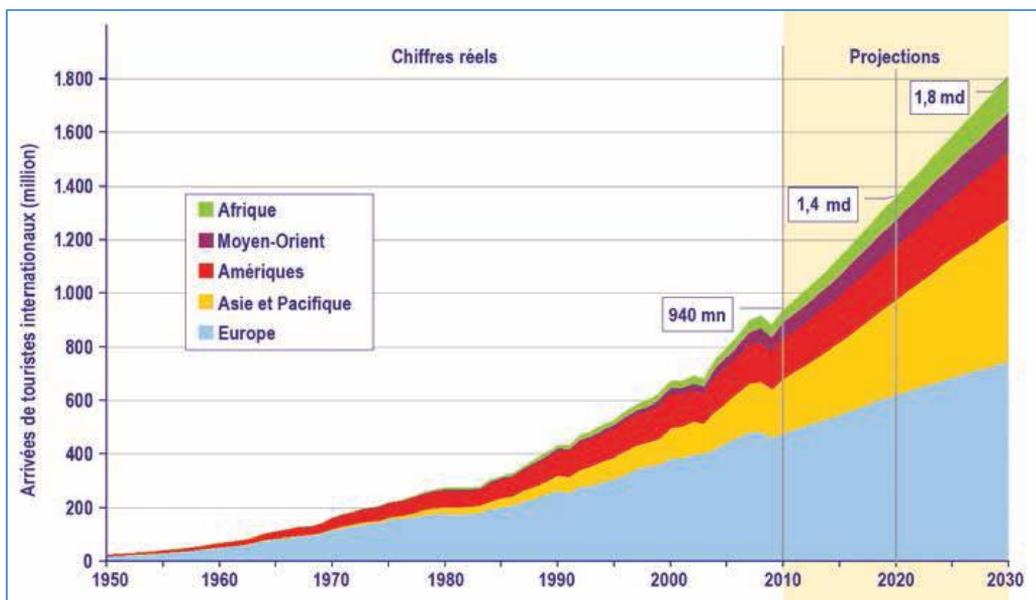

Fig. 5 UNWTO forecast for the horizon of the 2030s (Tourism towards 2030 UNWTO)

The old European continent preserves its autonomy as the world's no. 1 tourist destination "with a market share of 51% in 2014. The tourism industry (directly and indirectly) generates 9.7% of the total GDP of the 28 EU countries, a figure that is projected to rise to 10.4% by 2025. "[7]

At EU level, tourism employs almost 25 million people and the visitor exports generate 351 billion per year. Tourism stimulates economic growth by generating income, workplaces, investments and exports, the preservation of cultural heritage, improved infrastructure and facilities for local communities, etc. Considering all the above, public and private stakeholders in European tourism have gathered under one voice and launched the "Tourism for Growth and Jobs Manifesto**"** published to coincide with the European Tourism Day (16 December this year), the "Tourism for Growth and Jobs Manifesto" emphasises the key priorities of the EU's policy for this sector in the following years. The manifest comprises **eight key points**: *Competitiveness, Digitalization, Good governance, Common promotion, Reduction of seasonality, Skills and*

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6 http://www.gandul.info/it-c/raport-cisco-cati-utilizatori-de-internet-vor-fi-in-2017-si-de-cate-ori-va-creste-traficul-de-date-10935017

7 http://www.horeca.ro/turism/4141-industria-turistica-europeana-a-lansat-manifestul-tourism-for-growth-jobs.html

qualifications, Sustainability, Connectivity (transport).[8] There are over 450 million Internet users in Europe, while, in Central and Eastern Europe, the average speed of broadband internet will increase 2.7 times in the period 2012-2017, from 13.6 Mbps to 37 Mbps.[9]

Europe remains by far the most connected part of the world to the Internet, where 82.1 of the total population has at least one connection to the Internet, followed by America with 60 percent. Europe also remains the champion of mobile connectivity, with 78 data connections per one hundred inhabitants.[10].In such a situation, we ask ourselves: where is the world heading, towards a new industry, the Internet industry, that, despite the benefits of information, can also create an addiction?

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8   http://www.horeca.ro/turism/4141-industria-turistica-europeana-a-lansat-manifestul-tourism-for-growth-jobs.html

9   http://www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collateral/service-provider/visual-networking-index-vni/white_paper_c11-520862.html

10   http://www.go4it.ro/internet/itu-32-miliarde-de-utilizatori-internet-la-sfarsitul-acestui-an-14355310/

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