

# ***Gender Discourse Actions and Emotional Communication Practices on Social Media Platforms: A Case Study of the “Anatomy of a Fall” Incident on Microblog***

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**Abstract:** The rise of social media has provided individuals with expansive platforms for expression. Gender issues have gradually shifted from private discussions to public debates, becoming more visible in online spaces. This study takes the “Anatomy of a Fall” incident as a case study and applies grounded theory and the CAPS framework to code and analyze relevant Microblog text data, while also using social network analysis and sentiment analysis to examine the characteristics of gender discourse actions and emotional communication on social media. The findings show that in the new media context, emotional dissonance often serves as the initial trigger for expression. These discussions engage with feminist communication practices and eventually build a sense of community through mediated solidarity.

## **1. Background and Study**

With the continuous development of the internet, social media holds a significant position in people’s daily lives. Individuals publish and share information on social platforms, maintain interpersonal relationships through various platforms, and express personal opinions and emotions about various events online. Consequently, the traditional information dissemination model dominated by mainstream media is gradually being replaced by a user-driven content production model. This transformation has turned the online public opinion arena into a primary battlefield for information dissemination, a battleground for ideological confrontation, and a grand stage for discourse clashes.

As one of the largest social platforms in China, Microblog plays an important role in the communication space[1]. Most notably, it functions to gather groups and spread public opinion in information dissemination and public discussion. Microblog has significant public characteristics. Although the “public sphere” has a strong utopian color and must meet the conditions of being “outside power,” “participation by all,” “rational discussion,” and “public interest,” Microblog, in terms of its communication characteristics, is the social platform most likely to approach this concept[2]. Against the backdrop of the continuous strengthening of public discourse subject consciousness, the comment section on Microblog highlights public characteristics through users’ free expression in the form of likes, comments, and shares. Based on these characteristics, the

Microblog social network platform can provide space for extensive discussion and fermentation of some news, public opinion, and special topics.

As the internet becomes an important space for public affairs participation, gender issues have been widely discussed online, especially on Microblog. Since the outbreak of the “Me Too” movement, discussions on feminist topics have gradually increased in this public opinion arena. Keywords such as “gender,” “gender conflict and opposition” frequently appear on the hot search list, attracting a lot of attention and discussion. This has changed the long-term “voiceless” state of women in China. The empowerment of new media has allowed them to speak out and gain a certain degree of discourse power. Through new media platforms like Microblog and WeChat, women have significantly changed from being a “silenced group” to actively voicing and discussing, further promoting the spread and dissemination of feminism.

Based on the above background, this paper focuses on the discussions related to the women’s film “Anatomy of a Fall” on Microblog and raises the following questions: What are the main themes of discussions on women’s issues on the Microblog platform, and what are the more common themes? Do these discussions involve a lot of feminist content, and what are the emotional tendencies of the expressers towards feminism? What are the specific characteristics of gender discourse actions and emotional communication practices on social media platforms regarding women’s issues?

## 2. Research design

### 2.1 Study population and sample selection

This study uses Microblog texts related to the keyword “Anatomy of a Fall” as the research subjects. Microblog was chosen as the research platform because it is one of the most popular social media platforms in China, with a very large user base, having over 536 million registered users and more than 246 million daily active users[3]. When the data collection for this study began, the data collection period on the Microblog platform was limited by the system to March 24, 2024, to March 31, 2024. This is because the director of “Anatomy of a Fall,” Justine Triet, and others held the China premiere and post-screening meeting at Peking University on March 24. This premiere generated many secondary topics related to this women’s film, officially pushing “Anatomy of a Fall” to a high level of attention and discussion. Therefore, this time point was chosen as the starting point.

Researchers used keywords such as “Anatomy of a Fall” and “Anatomy of a Fall Premiere” to write Python code to crawl relevant data from the Microblog platform. In the end, 7,958 valid Microblog main posts (i.e., posts) were collected, including information fields such as username, Microblog content, number of reposts, number of comments, number of likes, and posting time. To ensure the objectivity and accuracy of the study, the collected comments were cleaned, including handling missing values and manually filtering out irrelevant information such as advertisements and comment images. The cleaned data were sorted according to the corresponding Microblog content, resulting in a total of 7,826 comments.

### 2.2 Specific research methods

#### 2.2.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a methodology for constructing theories based on qualitative data analysis[4]. As an effective data processing and analysis method, grounded theory has been widely applied in user-based qualitative research[5]. However, Grounded theory coding starts from a micro-level perspective, making it difficult to analyze macro-level overall influencing factors[6]. CAPS theory, on the other hand, has strong constructiveness at the macro level. Therefore, this study adopts the



software to randomly select 20% of the analysis units for primarily manual, machine-assisted open coding of content texts to form initial categories. Primary coding is a key step in obtaining discussion themes, attitude information, and emotional tendencies from the content texts. The basis for category construction is obtained through comprehensive literature reviews and theoretical summaries. Through continuous induction, organization, and filtering, part of the coding process is shown in Table 1. Each concept has representative comment sentences to define phenomena, resulting in a total of 40 initial concepts and 12 subcategories, as shown in Table 2.

Table 1 Example of the construction of the "Anatomy of a Fall" blog text category

Initial concepts	original statement
Movie Praise	#FallingTrial Word of Mouth # A very thought-provoking movie that is well worth watching.
watch repeatedly	Thought-provoking masterpiece that must be seen in theaters!n Brush up.
Subverting gender stereotypes	Marriage itself is complex, this movie is more proof of this, but also subverted the traditional image of women, people are emotional, sometimes simple and sometimes complex, after watching bring me more calm and thinking.
Plot Discussion	There are as many interpretations of those audio files as there are of the plot, I guess.
feel indebted as if it were received in person	Literary scripts, lots of documentary filmmaking, good movies are always empathetic.
Want cultural and creative products	Dogs are good and bad, so where to buy Messi's perimeter.
Combating Feminist Stigmatization	Meh, man (blank stare.jpg) Personally, I don't think there's any need for some of the reviews to over-interpret the supposedly feminist attributes of this piece either.
Awareness of healthy marriages	Whether it's a woman in the house and a man out, or a woman out and a man in the house, there is always someone in the marriage and the family who sacrifices a little bit more, and how the balance is mastered in it is something that couples should all learn and explore.
.....	.....

Table 2 Examples of textual categories and conceptual constructions of the "Anatomy of a Fall" tweets.

subcategory	Effective concepts
Marriage awareness	Awareness of Healthy Marriage Patterns, Awareness of Marriage Truths, Awareness of Family Life, Awareness of Power Structures
Cognizance of Film Art	Knowledge of movie titles, knowledge of BGM, knowledge of translations, knowledge of movie genres
Gender Cognition	Awareness of gender equality, awareness of gender roles, awareness of gender stereotypes, awareness of gender identity
Interpersonal Cognition	Awareness of Love Relationships, Awareness of Marriage Relationships, Awareness of Family Relationships, Awareness of Parent-Child Relationships
move and sympathize	Gratitude, empathy
happy	happy, pained
proud (of one's achievements etc)	Proud, accomplished
Helpless sadness	Powerlessness, sadness
movie review	Movie Praise, Movie Trolling, Movie Values
Interactive exchanges	Discussion of the plot, wanting to be creative, speculation of domestic remake, sharing of movie-going experience, sharing of experience of the event "Anatomy of a Fall Director's Dialogue with Yang Li-Sodium Qi Xi".
Feminist communication	Women speaking up for themselves, subverting gender stereotypes, asserting women's voice, fighting feminist stigma, exposing women's plight
Continuous viewing	Repeat viewing, wanting to watch

### 3.1.2 Axial coding and corresponding emotional analysis

Axial coding requires forming independent categories based on open coding, analyzing and establishing connections between these independent categories, and ultimately forming core categories[10]. To ensure the rationality and scientific nature of axial coding, this study combines semantic network analysis. The Microblog texts after open coding (such as the typical sentences in Table 1) are analyzed using Python for text semantic network analysis, and the semantic network

graph is drawn using the software rostrcm6 (see Figure 2).

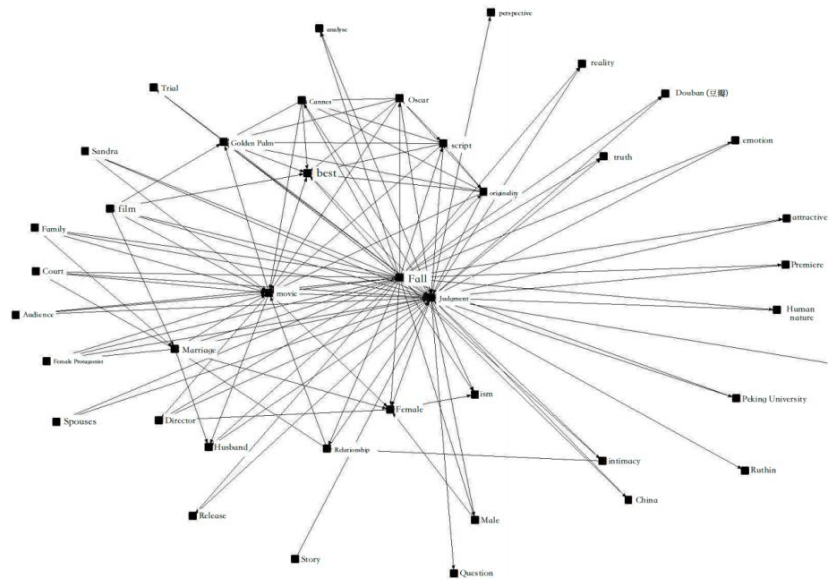


Figure 2 Semantic network diagram for the text of the "Falling Trial" tweet.

Semantic networks are descriptive graphs of nodes and arcs used to represent complex concepts and how they are related. The density of the lines in the graph indicates the frequency of co-occurrence. It reflects a stronger correlation between the two in the subject's perception[11]. As shown in Figure 2, the two main central nodes of the "Anatomy of a Fall" microblog text are "trial" and "film," and other nodes are connected to these two central nodes to show their importance. In the graph, the related words around "trial" are "script," "truth," "feeling," "intimacy," "female," "relationship," and "male," etc. Related words around 'film' are 'director', 'film', 'audience', 'family', 'premiere', 'female', 'relationship', 'male', etc.

In addition, words such as 'female', 'female lead', 'ideology', 'male', 'marriage', 'relationship', and 'intimacy' are more central, indicating a high level of attention from commenters on female roles and feminist topics. This suggests that gender-related themes are core discussion topics in these texts, laying the foundation for the author's subsequent research on gender discourse and emotional practices regarding the "Anatomy of a Fall" event.

It is not difficult to find that there are many discussions around feminism in these texts, as well as many content discussions derived from the movie plot. The keyword co-occurrence network relationship shown in this graph provides direction for further determining the main axis coding in the following text.

Since 'Anatomy of a Fall' itself is a female-centric movie, and the high-profile public opinion triggered by the premiere at Peking University also stems from gender topics with strong feminist overtones, it is necessary to conduct sentiment analysis on the Microblog texts under the keyword "Anatomy of a Fall". This can largely reveal the main emotional tendencies of the discussants. Sentiment analysis of 7,826 pieces of data first yields a graph of sentiment scores changing with the sequence number of the corpus, as shown in Figure 3. Next is the classification of sentiment attitudes, as shown in Table 3, which subdivides the sentiment distribution results into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative emotions. Among them, positive emotions account for 64.52%, with 5,049 entries; neutral emotions account for 14.67%, with 1,148 entries; and negative emotions account for 20.82%, with 1,629 entries. Based on this, a proportion chart of the three sentiment attitudes can be obtained, as shown in Figure 4. It can be seen that, among all Microblog comments, the overall emotional orientation tends to be positive. At the same time, based on the results of open coding, the



public has more positive evaluations of this female-centric movie and also shows a supportive attitude towards the feminist expressions in the “Anatomy of a Fall” event."

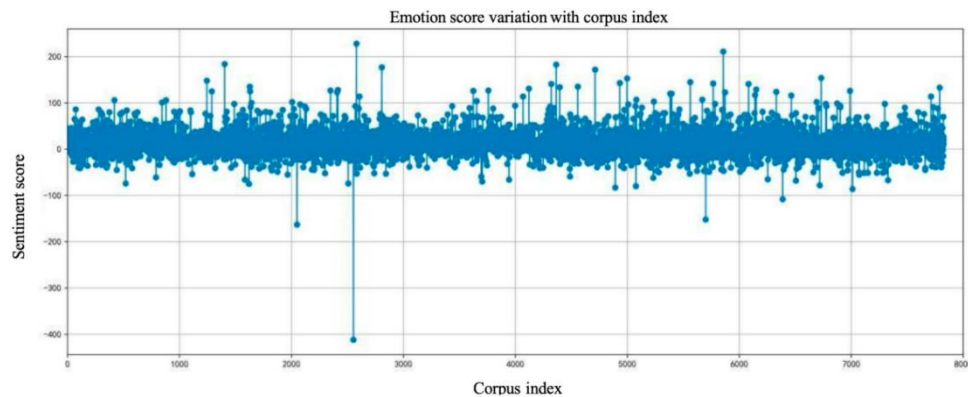


Figure 3 Plot of change in affective scores with corpus ordinal number

Table 3 Sentiment analysis of the text of the "Falling Judgement" tweet

types of emotions	Sample size	Proportion%	Emotion level	Quantity	proportion%
positive emotion	5049	64.52	General(0—10)	1836	23.46
			Moderate(10—20)	1286	16.43
			Advanced(above20)	1927	24.62
neutral emotion	1148	14.67			
negative emotiond	1629	20.82	General(-10—0)	939	12
			Moderate(-20—-10)	395	5.05
			Advanced(below-20)	147	1.88
Total	7826	100			

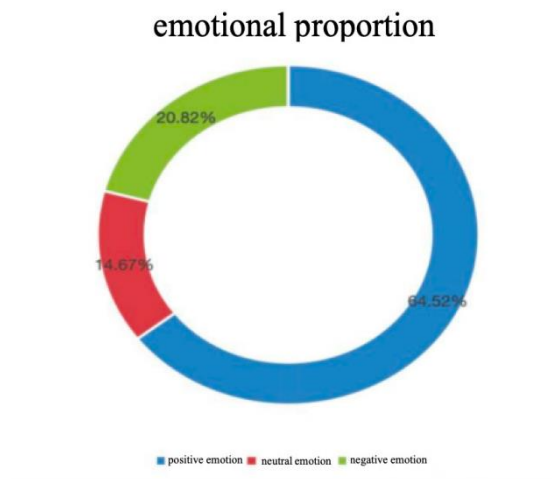


Figure 4 Emotional profile of the "Falling Trial" tweet text

Given that the feedback from Microblog texts shows a clear emotional bias, and through open coding, it can be found that in addition to expressing emotions, Microblog texts also exhibit two main categories: cognition and action. This provides empirical support for using the three dimensions of ‘cognition, emotion, and behavior’ under the CAPS theory as the main categories in this paper. Finally, combining the results of semantic network analysis and sentiment analysis, we further screened and classified the 12 conceptual categories in Table 2, completed the axial coding, and ultimately formed three main categories based on the CAPS theoretical framework, as shown in Table

4”.

Table 4 Spindle coding table for the text of the "Falling Trial" tweet.

main category	subcategory	Scope
cognitively	Marriage awareness	Awareness of concepts related to marriage, such as models of healthy marriages, truth about marriage, family life, power structures
	Cognizance of Film Art	Awareness of the effects of artistic expression in movies, such as movie genres, movie titles, BGM, translations
	Gender Cognition	Awareness of gender-related concepts such as gender equality, gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender identity
	Interpersonal Cognition	Awareness of concepts related to interpersonal relationships, such as love relationships, marriage relationships, family relationships, parent-child relationships
move (emotionally)	move and sympathize	Expressions of comments that reflect moving and empathetic feelings, such as gratitude and empathy
	happy	Expressions of comments that reflect pleasure and relief, such as happy, pained
	proud (of one's achievements etc)	Commentary expressions that reflect honor and pride, such as pride
	Helpless sadness	Expressions of comments that reflect hard feelings and pain, such as
gestion	movie review	Evaluative behaviors about the value, strengths, and weaknesses of movies, such as movie praise, movie trolling, movie value
	Interactive exchanges	Discussions, popularizations, explanations and other behaviors related to the content of the movie and its derivatives, such as plot discussions, wanting to create literature, speculations on domestic remakes, sharing of movie-watching feelings, sharing of feelings on the event "Falling Judgement Director's Interview with Yang Li-Sodium Qi Xi".
	Feminist communication	Conducting communication acts on feminism, such as women speaking up for themselves, subverting gender stereotypes, advocating for women's voice, countering feminist stigmatization, and exposing women's plight
	Continuous viewing	Commentary expressive behaviors of continuous movie viewing, e.g., wanting to watch, repeated viewings

The results of the axial coding indicate that the emotions expressed, the cognition displayed, and the actions initiated based on the “Anatomy of a Fall” event are the main categories of the text content under the “Anatomy of a Fall” keyword on the Microblog platform. In other words, the discussions in these Microblog texts mainly include three parts: cognition, emotion, and behavior. Moreover, many of these discussions involve feminism, with most commenters holding a positive emotional attitude towards this female-centric movie and its feminist expressions.

#### 4. Characterization of gender discourse actions and affective communication practices

##### 4.1 Emotional Expression: Using Emotional Disorder as the Starting Point for "Voicing Out"

Some scholars have found that "gender awareness is not something that a person can attain simply by being alone in a room and reflecting. Instead, it is usually inspired and influenced by discourse, including books, speeches, social movements, films, and more[12]." Currently, with the rapid development of the internet, women who have grown up alongside it have more avenues to engage with feminist discourse, such as current news, films, and social movements. However, the impact of these discourses is not uniform or automatic; it operates by evoking individuals' experiences of "emotional disorder" and providing explanations for those experiences[13]. Specifically, emotional dissonance arises from the inconsistency and discord between women's self-perception and the self that is expected by social customs[14].

A premiere of ‘Anatomy of a Fall’ was held at the Centennial Hall of Peking University on March 24. This premiere was described as “a premiere full of paternalistic overtones.” The film explores feminist themes, revealing societal stereotypes and challenges faced by women, with the director calling for attention and support for women. However, the focus of the discussion at the premiere was

on the director's age and appearance. When male professors present shared their impressions of the film, they immediately labeled the female director based on her age and appearance. This became the source of subsequent public opinion fermentation and also marked the starting point for gender discourse practices.

People's awakening to gender awareness and the practice of gender discourse usually begins with a feeling of "something is wrong," "uncomfortable," "not quite right," "shocking," "astonishing," or "incredible." For example:

The recent controversy at the Chinese premiere of "Anatomy of a Fall," where the behavior and remarks of the two men on stage in the video showed contempt and disdain, made me feel very uncomfortable both physically and mentally.

It is clear that when there is a conflict between self-perception as "a person" and societal expectations as "a woman," women fall into a state of emotional dissonance. To a large extent, this is the starting point for them to voice their opinions on social media platforms.

"Voicing out" is often seen as a feminist discourse action that makes gender issues visible and prominent[13]. Similarly, the concept of "voice" out' is also a connective action mode that initiates dialogue, participation, and collaboration[13]. This connection might have been diachronic originally, but with the rise of social media platforms supporting UGC (User-Generated Content) creation, this connection has gradually become synchronic. Social media platforms empower women's discourse rights, enabling people to decisively voice out or question whenever they feel something is wrong or uncomfortable.

#### 4.2 Action Connection: Linking to Feminist Communication and Related Behaviors

Technological empowerment refers to "harnessing or stimulating the potential of disadvantaged groups through the use of new media, thereby enabling them to change their disadvantaged circumstances[15]." As a technological tool, social media has created a flexible space for active content production and autonomous social interaction. It has also granted the public, as subjects of digital discourse, greater invisible power and social status. Additionally, it has enhanced the digital self-efficacy of marginalized groups, empowering them to become transparent speakers who freely encode and decode messages in the digital space[16].

For women, social media platforms have given them the possibility of "self-rescue" through the media. Firstly, women use the media to address their own emotional disorders. Secondly, through gender discourse and actions such as feminist communication, some women with emotional disorders can reframe their identity from that of an "emotional alien." They see themselves as capable individuals who can use media connectivity. This allows them to establish connections with others and reduce feelings of isolation.

By coding the Microblog texts related to "Anatomy of a Fall" using grounded theory, the main category of "action" can be summarized in Microblog 7826. Under this main category, the subcategory of "feminist communication" can be further divided into effective concepts such as "women voicing for themselves," "subverting gender stereotypes," "advocating for women's discourse rights," "opposing the stigmatization of feminism," and "revealing women's predicaments."

These specific discourse actions have brought the discussion and topic level of the 'Anatomy of a Fall' public opinion event to new heights. They also connect with more women, influencing groups whose gender awareness has not yet awakened. For example:

"Everyone should be a feminist."

"This film reveals the complex judgment of women in social marriages. People are not concerned with the truth, but whether it meets society's perfect expectations of women. I believe women of all ages can resonate with this, and it is very worth watching."



"In the past and present, it is generally believed that women returning to the family is natural, and that it is difficult for women to succeed in their careers, etc. The film swaps the roles of men and women, allowing male characters to experience women's daily lives. This new perspective is something everyone needs to think about today."

On social platforms, the nested connections of various strong and weak relationships enhance the influence and cohesion of topics, stimulating free reporting and strong support from grassroots and disadvantaged groups[16]. Women's issues also expand their influence under this logic. Social media platforms give the previously disadvantaged gender group the opportunity to unite and seize the right to speak, allowing them not only to voice out but also to make their voices powerful. At the same time, in their daily "voicing out" interactions, they may distance themselves from, block, or blacklist those who cannot empathize or lack consensus on gender issues. Thus, using social media as an intermediary, they are connecting with each other while also establishing boundaries.

### 4.3 Media Cohesion: Forming a Community Through Online Solidarity

According to Ahmed's concept of "emotional economy," emotions circulate and are distributed in social and psychological fields similarly to commodities, generating value through circulation. Essentially, emotional circulation involves the flow of emotional symbols among different subjects[17]. Therefore, images, texts, and videos as emotional carriers have the function of conveying emotions and can generate value in the internet ecosystem.

In the 'Anatomy of a Fall' event, the path of emotional communication was achieved through the circulation of emotional carriers. On social media platforms, the film reviews of this female-centric movie, and the images of the male professor's arrogant posture at the Peking University premiere, served as emotional carriers. As public opinion expanded, these symbols allowed more women to build a "community of feeling" on internet platforms. They collectively felt anger at the male professor's disrespect, joy at the feminist expression of the film, and indignation at the stigmatization of women in contemporary society. For example:

"After watching the exchange at the Peking University premiere of 'Anatomy of a Fall,' I once again felt deeply and shockingly the profound predicament we women are in. I am very angry but also powerless. I thought there would be some improvement, but the reality shows that it is really, really difficult for individuals. The only thing one can do is to become a woman with more discourse power."

"Another highly commendable point of the film is that although it talks about marriage issues, its handling of gender issues is really, really comfortable. The female director is indeed a genius."

"The female lead of this film unveils the disguise and concealment of humanity by society. Therefore, being a woman is not just a gender label; it represents a specific social situation: being ignored, difficult to be independent, and stigmatized with emotional labels."

After constructing a "community of feeling," the next step in media-based solidarity is to establish an "emotional community." When individuals are immersed in the "emotional community" reconstructed by social media, they constantly feel this pervasive, shared "emotional atmosphere." However, the emergence of an "emotional community" also brings real concerns. Media-based solidarity can easily lead to emotional polarization of gender public opinion in digital spaces, potentially triggering large-scale online polarization events, which need to be addressed and mitigated.

## 5. Conclusion

Currently, social media and other digital platforms provide space and avenues for raising gender awareness, fostering female solidarity, and calling for social change, which has become a global phenomenon. This paper takes the 'Anatomy of a Fall' event as an example, first collecting text data

under the “Anatomy of a Fall” keyword on Microblog. Then, based on grounded theory and combined with the CAPS theoretical framework, it conducts three-level coding analysis on 7,826 Microblog text data. Additionally, it uses big data tools such as social network analysis and sentiment analysis to explore the characteristics of gender discourse actions and emotional communication practices on social media platforms. The study finds that the collected 7,826 Microblog texts mainly include three parts: cognition, emotion, and behavior. Many of these discussions involve feminism, with most commenters holding a positive emotional attitude towards this female-centric movie and its feminist expressions. The characteristics of gender discourse actions and emotional communication practices on social media platforms can be summarized as: using emotional dissonance as the starting point for “voicing out,” connecting through feminist communication and other actions, and finally forming various “communities” through media-based solidarity.

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