

**SOCIAL MEDIA'S NEW TREND: ASMR VIDEOS, RELATIONSHIP OF ASMR EXPERIENCES AND LONELINESS**

*Sosyal Medya Yeni Trendi: ASMR Videoları, ASMR Deneyimleri ile Yalnızlık İlişkisi*

Nesrin Duman<sup>1</sup>, Seda Nur Çiçek<sup>2\*</sup>, Gülnida Kamer Koç<sup>3</sup>, Zeynep Berfin Uzun<sup>4</sup>, Kübranur Çekmece<sup>5</sup>

Article Information	Abstract
<b>Research Article</b>	ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) videos are currently trending on social media, and they're said to have an outstanding impact on people's moods. ASMR, also referred to as brain massaging, is a psychological phenomenon characterized by tingling sensations, relaxation, and mood shifts. This feeling can be triggered by certain stimuli, such as whispered speech and visual and auditory triggers. Some studies show that individuals with high levels of stress and loneliness experience a more relaxing effect from ASMR videos. In this regard, it was aimed at examining the relationship between the loneliness levels and ASMR experiences of young people between the ages of 18 and 25. For this purpose, the "UCLA Loneliness Scale—Short Form" was given to 51 participants, then the ASMR video was watched and the "ASMR Experiences Evaluation Form" prepared by the researchers was applied to evaluate their ASMR experiences. The results found no significant relationship between young people's loneliness levels and ASMR experiences. ASMR experiences did not differ significantly according to loneliness level. Contrary to the positive statements expressed about ASMR videos, 49% of the participants in this study stated that they never wanted to watch ASMR videos again, and 43.1% stated that they did not feel a sense of relief. It is hoped that the study will serve as a resource for future research.
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<b>Makale Bilgisi</b>	<b>Özet</b>
<b>Araştırma Makalesi</b>	Sosyal medyanın yeni trendi olarak görülen Otonom Duyusal Meridyen Tepkisi (ASMR) videolarının insanların ruh hâli üzerinde oldukça olumlu etkileri olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Beyin masajı olarak da bilinen ASMR, karıncalanma hissi, gevşeme ve duygulanımdaki değişiklikler ile karakterize bir olgudur. Bu his fısıltılı konuşma ve görsel ve işitsel tetikleyiciler gibi belirli uyaranlarla tetiklenebilmektedir. Bazı araştırmalar, yüksek stres ve yalnızlık düzeyine sahip bireylerin ASMR videolarından daha rahatlatıcı bir etki yaşadığını göstermektedir. Bu doğrultuda 18-25 yaş aralığındaki gençlerin yalnızlık düzeyleri ile ASMR deneyimleri arasındaki ilişkinin incelenmesi hedeflenmiştir. Bu amaçla 51 katılımcıya "UCLA Yalnızlık Ölçeği- Kısa Form" verilmiş, ardından ASMR videosu izletilerek, ASMR deneyimlerini değerlendirmek üzere araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanmış "ASMR Deneyimleri Değerlendirme Anketi" uygulanmıştır. Sonuçlarda gençlerin yalnızlık düzeyleri ile ASMR deneyimleri arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmamıştır. ASMR deneyimleri yalnızlık düzeyine göre anlamlı farklılaşma göstermemiştir. ASMR videolarına yönelik ifade edilen olumlu bildirimlerin aksine, bu araştırmada katılımcıların %49'u ASMR videolarını bir daha asla izlemek istemediklerini ve %43,1'i rahatlama duygusu hissetmediklerini ifade etmiştir. Çalışmanın gelecek araştırmalara kaynak niteliğinde olması hedeflenmiştir.
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1 Assoc. Prof. Dr., Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, nesrinduman@windowslive.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-2751-8315  
2\*Corresponding Author, Psychology Student, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, ciceksn20@29mayis.edu.tr, ORCID: 0009-0009-5734-6591  
3 Psychology Student, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, kocgk20@29mayis.edu.tr, ORCID: 0009-0002-8927-339X  
4 Psychology Student, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, uzunzb19@29mayis.edu.tr, ORCID: 0009-0001-5595-2397  
5 Psychology Student, Istanbul 29 Mayıs University, kubranurcekmece@gmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0005-0562-9849

## INTRODUCTION

The physiological response to a sequence of audiovisual and tactile stimuli is referred to as an autonomous sensory meridian response, or ASMR (Trenholm-Jensen, 2022). ASMR describes a sensory experience triggered by certain sounds or stimuli that creates a pleasant feeling of numbness, relaxation, or tingling in people. Physiological reactions are characterized by tingling sensations, relaxation, and changes in affect (Trenholm-Jensen, 2022). This phenomenon is also referred to by different terms, such as “*Weird Sensation Feels Good*”, “*Attention-Induced Head Orgasm (AIHO)*”, and “*Attention-Induced Observant Euphoria*”.

The term ASMR was first coined by Jennifer Allen in 2010. She was a participant in an online forum (*steadyhealth.com forum*), proposed this term to describe her experiences. Afterwards, she formed the “Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response Group” on Facebook. She intended to create a community to bring together people who had also been experiencing this sensation. The worldwide community began to take shape with the efforts of Allen (“ASMR”, 2018). With the formation of communities, coordinated attempts began to arise, and there has been a significant increase in the number of videos published online that seek to trigger ASMR. With these developments, the structure of vlogs and ASMR videos have expanded from instructional to more personal, intimate viewing. ASMR videos have also started to gain popularity through online videos designed over time (Niu, 2022).

The increase in videos and the number of views reaching millions have also increased academic interest in this field. Barrett and Davies (2015) are the first academics to perform research on ASMR. They found that ASMR videos increased people's sensations of relaxation and that additional evidence showed temporary improvements in depression and chronic pain symptoms (Flynn, 2020). Various studies provide evidence of the positive impact of ASMR videos. Lee et al. (2019) found in their study that participants with high levels of happiness and calmness had a reduction in tension and depression after watching ASMR videos. Klausen (2019) similarly focused on the immediate relaxing effect of watching different ASMR videos.

There is a small body of research showing that viewers with higher levels of stress and loneliness experience a more relaxing effect from ASMR videos. Kircaburun et al. (2021) found that food strengthens the closeness between the viewer and the broadcaster, reduces the feeling of loneliness, and that people prefer these videos to create a virtual social community. According to Lee (2021), viewers who experienced loneliness claimed that ASMR videos had a greater calming effect on them. Additionally, those who watched ASMR videos and felt quite alone were more likely to seek comfort and manage their relationships. This study also found a significant difference in the immediate relaxing effect of ASMR video types. It was found that liquid sound, soap carving sound, and Mukbang videos had a higher instant relaxing effect. He suggested that the preference for mukbang strengthens the intimacy between the viewer and the broadcaster, which fulfills the viewers' desire for acceptance. This study shows that social presence is an essential factor in the immediate relaxing effect of ASMR videos on people. The findings showed the importance of the feeling of closeness arising from social need on the relaxation effect. Such a finding can be interpreted as saying that people who feel lonely value the presence and closeness of others more.

On the other hand, studies have reported that the intensity or effects of ASMR experience differ between individuals (Fredborg et al., 2018; Fredborg et al., 2017;

Engelbregt et al., 2022). As a result of the fact that ASMR varies depending on several factors and past research like this, the current study was designed with the hypothesis that variations in ASMR experiences might be correlated with people's levels of loneliness.

### **Aim of the Study**

The current study aims to ascertain whether those with high levels of loneliness have more intense ASMR experiences; in other words, to find out if there is a relationship between people's levels of loneliness and ASMR experiences and to analyse it, if any. Accordingly, the following questions wanted to be answered, and it was intended to ascertain each person's degree of loneliness and ASMR experiences before analysing the connection between them. The research questions of this study are:

- 1) Do participants' loneliness levels differ significantly according to ASMR experiences?
- 2) Do participants' ASMR experiences differ according to sex?
- 3) Is there a significant relationship between participants' loneliness levels and ASMR experiences?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study aims to explore the association between people's sense of loneliness and their ASMR experiences. In this sense, the study will provide information about whether people's ASMR experiences vary depending on the loneliness they experience. This study will make a significant contribution to the literature since ASMR is a new topic and has not been the subject of enough scientific research, especially in some cultures and countries. However, although various studies have been conducted on ASMR, there are not enough studies examining its relationship with the feeling of loneliness. Therefore, the aforementioned research will contribute to the data by examining the association between ASMR experiences and loneliness, and it will guide future research based on whether it corresponds with previous studies or not.

## **METHOD**

### **Model of the Research**

The model of the research is the survey model, which is "*a research model that aims to detect a past or present situation as it exists*" (Karasar, 2018, p.109). The "relational screening model," one of the screening models included in the general screening category that seeks to ascertain the presence and/or extent of change between two or more variables, was applied in this study. This model is made in the form of data pairs that will allow a relational analysis (Karasar, 2018, p.114).

### **Data Collection Tools**

The data for this research were collected using three forms: the "*Personal Information Form*," the "*UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form*," and the "*ASMR Experiences Evaluation Form*."

**Personal Information Form (PIF):** The PIF is prepared by the researchers and consists of some close-ended questions about sex, age, and diagnosis status.

**UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form:** The scale is a simplified version of the most recent ULS-20. After revising the scale, Hays and DiMatteo (1987) concluded that the short form is a reliable and valid alternative to the ULS-20. The correlation coefficient

between ULS-8 and ULS-20 was high ( $r = 0.91$ ). Yıldız and Duy (2014) conducted a validity and reliability assessment of the form in Turkey. There are eight items on the scale, and each one is related to a specific component. On a 4-point Likert-type scale, participants rate their responses. There are four possible responses: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, and (4) always. Elevated scores signify an increased degree of loneliness. The overall score is between 8 and 32.

**ASMR Experiences Evaluation Form:** The ASMR experiences evaluation form was formed by the researchers for this study. The purpose of the form's content was to learn more about the participants' opinions and experiences with ASMR. The survey asks about participants' emotional and physical reactions to ASMR experiences. The goal was to point out the participants' emotional, psychological, and bodily responses to ASMR. For the evaluation form, a 5-point Likert scale was used. It consists of seven questions that aim to learn about how they evaluate their ASMR experiences.

These questions are presented in Table 1. The participants' attitudes toward the ASMR videos they viewed were ascertained with the help of these seven questions.

### Data Analysis

In the analysis of the research results, the data collected from the forms and scales were digitized and entered the SPSS-22 program for Windows. To analyze the data, it was first determined whether the relevant data set showed a normal distribution. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) accept that the distribution is normal when the skewness and kurtosis values are between  $\pm 1.50$ . Since the skewness and kurtosis values of the UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form scores in the study are within this range, it can be said that the data set has a normal distribution (*see* Table 2). But the small number of participants in the subgroups (less than 15) prevents a normal distribution. If the number of subjects in the groups is  $n < 15$ , parametric tests are inappropriate (Büyüköztürk, 2013). As such, non-parametric methods were found suitable for analysis. Mann Whitney U, Kruskal Wallis H, and Spearman correlation were chosen for correlation analysis.  $p < .05$  and  $p < .001$  significance levels were preferred in interpretation.

### Study Group

This research was conducted in the fall semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. While determining the sampling method, the convenience sampling method is chosen. As a non-probability sampling technique, convenience sampling involves choosing samples from the population based only on what is convenient for the researcher. For the sample size, 51 people-10 males (19.6%) and 41 females (80.4%)-were determined. Participants were selected between the ages of 18 and 25.

**Table 1.** ASMR Evaluation Form

ASMR Experience	Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Regularly following ASMR videos	Never watched before	27	52,9
	Watch Sometimes	13	25,5
	Watch Often	6	11,8
	Regularly watch	4	7,8
	Always Watch	1	2,0
Consider following ASMR videos	Definitely not consider watching	25	<b>49,0</b>
	Not consider watching	9	17,6
	Might consider watching	8	15,7
	Probably consider watching	9	17,6
	Definitely consider watching	0	0

Tingling feelings	No tingling	15	29,4
	Slightly tingling	11	21,6
	Mostly Tingling	12	23,5
	Highly tingling	10	19,6
	Very highly tingling	3	5,9
Feeling of relief	Not relieved	22	<b>43,1</b>
	Slightly relieved	9	17,9
	Mostly relieved	9	17,9
	Highly relieved	5	9,8
	Very highly relieved	6	11,8
Reducing stress	Did not reduce stress	21	41,2
	Slightly reduced stress	10	19,6
	Mostly reduced stress	8	15,7
	Highly reduced stress	9	17,6
	Very highly reduced stress	3	5,9
Beneficial	Not useful	18	35,5
	Slightly useful	11	21,6
	Mostly useful	10	19,6
	Highly useful	9	17,6
	Very highly useful	3	5,9
Like/Dislike/Notr	Like	7	13,7
	Dislike	18	35,3
	Notr	26	<b>51,0</b>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>100,0</i>

## RESULTS

In this section, descriptive analysis results on the “UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form”, comparative analysis results according to demographic variables, and correlation analysis results on the relationship between loneliness and ASMR experiences will be presented, respectively.

### Descriptive Analysis of the “UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form”

The average score of the participants from the “UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form” is 15.35±3,83 points (See Table 2). The average score shows that young people's loneliness is at a moderate level.

**Table 2.** “UCLA Loneliness Scale Short-Form” Descriptive Analysis

	N	Min	Max	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
<i>UCLA Loneliness Scale Short-Form</i>	51	10,00	27,00	15,35	3,83	,903	,854

### Loneliness Comparison Analysis According to Sex

Mann Whitney U test analysis, one of the non-parametric tests, was conducted to determine whether participants' loneliness levels differ according to sex. In Mann Whitney U analysis results, loneliness level does not show a significant difference according to sex,  $U=202,500$ ,  $p>.05$ . Results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Loneliness Level Comparison Analysis According to Sex

	Female		Male		U	p
	n	Mdn	n	Mdn		
UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form	41	15	10	15	202,500	.952*

\* $p>.05$  no significant differentiation

### Loneliness Comparison Analysis According to ASMR Experience

Kruskal Wallis H test analysis, one of the non-parametric tests, was conducted to determine whether participants' loneliness levels differ according to ASMR experiences. In the Kruskal Wallis H analysis results, loneliness levels do not show a significant difference according to ASMR experiences, respectively  $H(3)=1,687$ ,  $p=.640$ ;  $H(3)=3,253$ ,  $p=.354$ ;  $H(3)=5,484$ ,  $p=.140$ ;  $H(3)=3,840$ ,  $p=.428$ ;  $H(3)=4,487$ ,  $p=.344$ ;  $H(3)=1,638$ ,  $p=.802$ ;  $H(3)=3,285$ ,  $p=.194$ . Results are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Loneliness Level Comparison Analysis According to ASMR Experiences

	ASMR Experience	n	H	df	p
UCLA Loneliness Scale- Short Form	Never watched before	27	1,687	3	.640*
	Watch Sometimes	13			
	Watch Often	6			
	Regularly watch	5			
	Definitely do not consider watching	25	3,253	3	.354*
	Do not consider watching	9			
	Might consider watching	8			
	Probably definitely consider watching	9			
	No tingling	15	5,484	3	.140*
	Slightly tingling	11			
	Mostly tingling	12			
	Highly tingling	10			
	Very highly tingling	3			
	Did not relieved	22	3,840	4	.428*
	Slightly relieved	9			
	Mostly relieved	9			
	Highly relieved	5			
	Very highly relieved	6			
	Did not reduce stress	21	4,487	4	.344*
	Slightly reduced stress	10			
	Mostly reduced stress	8			
	Highly reduced stress	9			
	Very highly reduced stress	3			
	Not useful	18	1,638	4	.802*
	Slightly useful	11			
	Mostly useful	10			
Highly useful	9				
Very highly useful	3				
Liked	7	3,285	2	.194*	
Disliked	18				
Notr	26				

\* $p>.05$  no significant differentiation

### Loneliness Level and ASMR Experiences Correlational Analysis

Participants' loneliness level and ASMR experiences are checked in Spearman's rho correlation analysis. The results are presented in Table 5. Accordingly, no significant correlational relationship was detected between loneliness level and ASMR experiences,  $r(49) = .198$ ,  $p>.05$ .

**Table 5.** Loneliness And ASMR Experiences Spearman Correlation Analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
<sup>1</sup> UCLA Loneliness Scale Short-Form <sup>a</sup>								
<sup>2</sup> ASMR regularly watching		<b>.149*</b>						

<sup>3</sup> ASMR consider watching	<b>,075*</b>	,702**					
<sup>4</sup> ASMR pickle	<b>,052*</b>	,199	,241				
<sup>5</sup> ASMR relief	<b>,025*</b>	,553**	,764**	,326*			
<sup>6</sup> ASMR stress reduction	<b>,075*</b>	,663**	,813**	,276*	,860**		
<sup>7</sup> ASMR useful	<b>,036*</b>	,459**	,713**	,088	,643**	,645**	
<sup>8</sup> ASMR experience feeling <sup>b</sup>	<b>,198*</b>	,063	,068	-,001	-,079	,060	-,016

\*p>.05 no significant correlation

\*\*p<.001 significant correlation

<sup>a</sup> N=51, <sup>b</sup> N=51

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The term Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response, or ASMR for short, describes how the body reacts to different tactile and visual and auditory inputs. As of today, ASMR has become a very popular type of content with various types that is being consumed by many people of all ages. Previous studies on ASMR have found that, apart from being only relaxing, autonomous sensory meridian response has positively affected even chronic problems such as depression and tension, as well as having a socially comforting aspect to it.

Klausen's (2019) study answers the question about the videos' power to trigger a sense of human touch that was asked by one of these ASMR'tists. They claimed that ASMR videos satisfy the "*touch starvation*" of modern humans by providing experiences of tele present social audio-grooming. "*As the endorphins triggered by these behaviours begin to flood the body, we experience a rising sense of warmth, a feeling of peace with the world, of well-being [...] the effect is instantaneous and direct: The physical stimulation of touch tells us more about the inner feelings of the "groomer" and in a more direct way than any word could possibly do.*" (Dunbar, 2004, p. 102). They concluded that ASMR videos offered a unique opportunity to investigate the relationship between the senses of touch and hearing and shared their perspective on the ways in which ASMR videos can enhance social and haptic experiences.

In a study that was conducted in South Korea, researchers used a novel auditory stimulus with the addition of natural sounds as a sensory stimulus to present "ASMR triggers", for sleep induction in their study (Lee et al., 2019). According to their results, the suggested auditory stimulus may trigger the brain waves needed for sleep while also maintaining the user's psychological comfort, which is a significant finding that offers an excellent insight to improve the quality of sleep via ASMR.

In another study, Niu (2022) examines the parasocial attractions and interaction types of 2663 ASMR videos on YouTube in order to identify the different experiences and reactions of the consumers. They have discovered that watching ASMR videos evokes feelings of social interaction, soothed physical closeness, and sensory-rich activity observation.

The experiences and meanings of autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) were examined in a study by Trenholm-Jensen (2022) from the viewpoint of the viewer. According to their analysis, ASMR is perceived as a comforting social environment as opposed to a purely physiological experience.

Two tests that examine the physiological and emotional aspects of the ASMR response are presented by Lee (2021). Both studies found that watching ASMR videos

only enhanced the pleasant feelings of individuals who had already experienced ASMR. An association between ASMR, increased skin sensitivity, and a decreased heart rate was shown by the results of the study. Results show that ASMR is a dependable, physiologically based experience with potential therapeutic benefits for both physical and mental health.

Kircaburun (2021), who has researched the relationship between the audience and the mukbang streamer, found results pointing to lessened feelings of isolation and that people liked these videos because they fostered a sense of virtual community. One correlational study investigates the relationship between a person's overall health, happiness, and social connectedness and their regular engagement in ASMR videos. Contrary to earlier studies, the findings indicated that the length of time spent watching ASMR does not correspond with happiness, overall health, or social connectivity.

This current study focused more on ASMR's social influence and how it may have affected individuals with higher isolation levels. Deriving from these several diverse outcomes, it is aimed to observe the relationship between individuals' loneliness levels and the effects of ASMR-type content. Data gathered from the “*UCLA Loneliness Scale-Short Form*” and “*ASMR Experiences Evaluation Form*” prepared by the researchers have demonstrated that there is no significant correlation between the degree of loneliness and ASMR experiences. The reactions of individuals in our country towards ASMR videos, which are seen as a social media trend, have not been as expected. The majority of the participants did not like the videos and stated that they did not plan to watch them again. Additionally, the majority of participants did not report feelings of relief.

It is believed that this study carries significance due to the lack of information about social isolation and the ASMR correlation.

### **Suggestions And Limitations**

**Restricted Sample Size:** One of the primary limitations of our study is the restricted sample size, consisting of a limited number of participants. Consequently, the findings may have limitations in generalizing to a broader population. Besides this, non-probability sampling does not allow a researcher to extend the results of a study to a general population. Utilizing a more extensive and diverse sample in future research could provide a more comprehensive assessment of the relationship between feelings of loneliness and ASMR experiences. In our study, there were 41 female participants and 10 male participants, making it challenging to fully comprehend the impact of gender on ASMR experiences. Therefore, future research could benefit from considering gender differences by employing a larger and more balanced sample. It is a common situation that the number of male participants is low in studies conducted in Turkey. The same situation was encountered in this study.

**The ASMR Experiences Evaluation Form:** Another limitation is the sensitivity of the ASMR evaluation form, which was developed by researchers. The lack of a valid and reliable measurement material developed in our country regarding this current issue has prevented the subject from being examined in detail. The developed form may not adequately measure scales, highlighting a constraint in our study. Using more specific and responsive scales in future research could contribute to obtaining more comprehensive results.

**Content of ASMR Videos:** The content of ASMR videos can vary widely. The limited range of ASMR video content used in this study may not fully reflect the effects



of different types of videos on feelings of loneliness. Exploring a broader spectrum of video content in future studies could offer a more nuanced understanding of its impact.

**Cross-cultural Differences:** When we look at the research on ASMR, while most of the studies conducted in Asian culture have yielded positive results regarding individuals' ASMR experiences, our study's data reveals that a certain percentage of participants expressed not liking ASMR videos or not feeling anything at all. This has led us to contemplate whether there might be differences in ASMR experiences across cultures. Therefore, it is crucial to pay closer attention to cross-cultural differences in research and emphasize these differences in future studies, conducting more comprehensive research. In order to comprehend the differences observed in participants' responses to ASMR videos, studies can be conducted with larger participant groups from diverse cultures. The role of cultural perceptions and values in the impact of ASMR videos can be examined. In-depth analyses can be conducted on the cultural factors influencing participants' ASMR experiences, exploring the extent to which these factors are effective and how this effectiveness may vary. In conclusion, understanding cross-cultural differences and conducting comprehensive research that encompasses these differences can provide a broader perspective in the field of ASMR.

**Restricted Psychological Variables:** In addition to investigating the link between feelings of loneliness and ASMR, examining different psychological variables, such as stress and depression, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of ASMR's potential effects on emotional well-being. This approach may contribute to a more holistic exploration of the psychological impact of ASMR.

### **Ethical Issues**

Research started after obtaining ethical approval from the İstanbul 29 Mayıs University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee on the date of 06.11.2023, under reference number 2023/11-12. Participants were informed about the research before the scales were administered. Participation in the research was voluntary. The informed consent form and scales were presented to the participants face-to-face.

### **Contribution Rate of the Researchers**

All authors contribute equally within the scope of the research.

### **Statement of Conflict of Interest**

The authors of this study did not have any personal or financial conflicts of interest within the scope of the study.

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