Awareness, Utilization and Perception of Social Media in E-commerce among Staff and Students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State

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Abstract
Social media allow users to connect by generating personal information profiles and inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles. However, the use of the social media has taken a different dimension as it now provides a platform for people to discover more about their preferred companies and the products they sell. This research therefore seeks to ascertain the awareness, utilization and perception of the social media in e-commerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State. It has four research objectives that were used to form research questions. The study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The study used the survey research method with questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. A total of 376 copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents while 365 were valid, presented in frequencies and percentages on tables and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings however show that majority of the respondents are aware of online shopping; despite this awareness, they do not use it to buy goods and services online. Findings also show that most of the respondents who utilize it to buy use it once in a while. The study also found out that respondents encounter some challenges while using the social media for e-commerce. These challenges include network reliability issues and fear of adequate security (cyber fraud) among other challenges. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers therefore recommended that e-commerce companies should adopt more flexible strategies or approaches such as the pay on delivery approach and a more personalized (one-on-one) customer service approach among other recommendations.
Keywords: Awareness, Utilization, Perception, Use, Social Media, E-commerce

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Introduction

The social media cannot be fully understood without understanding the Web 2.0 first. The Web 2.0 is used to describe a new way in which end users use the World Wide Web (www), a place where content is endlessly created and modified by users in a sharing and collaborative way. It has so much to do with what people are doing with the technology than the technology itself, for rather than merely retrieving information, users are now creating and consuming it, and hence adding value to the websites that permit them to do so" (Campbell, Leyland, Michael and Pierre, 2011, p. 87). Social media allow users to connect by generating personal information profiles and inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 63).

Social media has however progressed from simply providing a platform for people to stay in touch with their family and friends to a place where consumers can discover more about their preferred companies and the products they sell. Business entrepreneurs are utilizing these sites as an avenue to reach consumers and provide a new way to shop. The advances in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the emergence of the Internet have revolutionized business activities enabling new ways of conducting business through electronic means referred to as electronic commerce (Zwass 2003; Turban, King, Lee & Viehland, 2004). This is what e-commerce is all about.

E-commerce also known as electronic commerce or internet commerce simply refers to any business transaction conducted online. It is the use of the internet for marketing, identification, payment and delivery of goods and services. Through the e-commerce technology, the internet has revolutionised the mode of business transactions by providing customers with the ability to bank, invest, purchase, distribute, communicate, explore and research from virtually anywhere, anytime where there is internet access (Anup, 1997; Ayo, Adewoye & Oni, 2011).

Nigeria's e-commerce industry is significantly growing after the coming of jumia.com in 2001. There are now numerous online retailers such as Jumia, Konga, Payporte, Vconnect, Kara, Jiji, Printivo Stores, Ajebomarket, Kusnap etc. The products and services available on these platforms include sale of shoes, bags, hair products, gift items, beauty and skin care products, health care products, electronic and phone gadgets, computers and its accessories, event planning, home canvas, financial coaching etc.

According to Uzialko (2017), e-commerce on social media started off in a pretty organic way with people simply posting the things they were buying on social media. This led marketers to quickly recognize the power of these 'friend'

recommendations and started proactively recruiting people to sell products. Social media is a useful way for both companies and customers to create and distribute content about products sold online in the form of reviews, ratings and photos of the products in use.

Despite the global reach of e-Commerce activities, it seems that developing countries are yet to take full advantages that e-Commerce technology has to offer. Licker and Motts (2000) mentioned that huge gap still exists in the e-Commerce adoption between the developed and developing countries, thereby creating a digital divide. This submission was further supported by (Akintola, Akinyede, & Agbonifo, 2011; Kim, Galliers, Shin, Ryoo, & Kim, 2012; Rose & Dhandayudham, 2014).

Besides the fact that the world has gone online, Nigeria is still more of a cash society than a cashless one as most business transactions are more or less cash driven unlike the western world where individuals order for their products online and pay through online transfers.

This study therefore intends to ascertain the awareness, utilization and perception of staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo state towards the use of social media in e-commerce.

Statement of Problem
Shopping has always been a social experience. When you see two or three people discussing in a market or supermarket, it is likely that they may be discussing the merits and demerits of a certain product or service. All that has changed now as technology has changed the way people socialize. Today, individuals consult with or search on social media before buying any product or service. Companies now target social media platforms with ads, articles, and social pages for their brands. The rise of digitalization has transformed the way companies operate. Customers no longer need to take a trip to brick and mortar stores to make their purchases. Ecommerce companies still deal on goods and services, but now this takes place across multiple touch points within an online environment.

It is obvious that there is a paradigm shift in the way people decide on what to purchase, purchase the product and even pay for the product. This paradigm shift has made shopping more interesting, interactive and more engaging and socially rich. The social media are now being employed by individuals to source products and services for shopping.

It is important to note here that literature search by the researchers suggest that there is dearth of recent studies on the use of social media for ecommerce among people in South East, Nigeria, hence the need for this study. This research is therefore set to ascertain the awareness, utilization and perception of the use of social media in e-commerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State.

Research Objectives

1. To find out the level of awareness of social media for ecommerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State.
2. To ascertain the extent to which social media is utilized for ecommerce activities among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State.
3. To ascertain the social media platform that staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State prefer most for ecommerce.
4. To find the benefits derived from the use of social media for ecommerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State.
5. To investigate the challenges hampering the use of social media in e-commerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of social media for ecommerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State?
2. To what extent do staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State utilize social media for ecommerce activities?
3. Which social media platform do staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State prefer most for ecommerce?
4. What are the benefits derived from the use of social media for ecommerce by staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State?
5. What are the challenges hampering the use of social media in e-commerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State?

Literature Review

Some years ago, business owners used the traditional media of communication to get in touch with their audiences, and to create awareness about their products. This is rapidly changing. Kumah (2019) posits that "over the past quarter century, there has been a shift from the traditional way of marketing to a new electronic age". Researches indicate that mass media audiences are progressively turning towards the new media for information and fulfillment of various communication needs (Rudloff & Fray, 2010; O'Toole, 2000). This indicates a paradigm shift from the mainstream media especially among the 'millenials' or 'digital natives' to the new or digital media. It is quite difficult to understand the new media or more specifically the social media without appreciating the web 2.0. Web 2.0 is described as: "a

collection of open source, interactive and user controlled online applications extending the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes. Web 2.0 applications support the creation of informal users' networks facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing the efficient generation, dissemination, sharing and editing/refining of informational content" (Constantinides & Fountain, 2007).

Safko and Brake observed that social media is an umbrella term referring to activities, practices, behaviors among communities of the peoples who gather online to share and exchange information, knowledge and opinions using communicational media.

Social media can also be defined as any website which allows users to share their content, opinions, views and encourages interaction and community building. Examples are Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace etc (Sisira, 2011). These (social media) are elements of the new media (internet) that function and are based on the ideologies of web 2.0. This means that they are platforms that support and allow user generated content (UGC). In these platforms users are no longer just consumers, they are producers as well; they are as Odii (2013) describes it "prosumers". They are internet-based platforms through which people can create and exchange information in a participatory manner on a real-time basis, (Odii, 2013).

Gone are the days when power rested in the hands of a few content creators and media distributors. Gone are the days when marketers controlled the communication path between advertisement and consumer. Today's model is collaborative, collective, customized and shared. It is a world in which the consumer is the creator, consumer and distributor of content (Otugo, Uzuegbunam and Obikeze, 2015). Today there are over a billion content creators and hundreds of millions of distributors. All these clarifications point to the fact that social media enables everyone to be a content creator and blurs the line between media and user.

The past decade witnessed a huge transformation in the media landscape as consumers are progressively using social networking sites to look for information on various areas of interest including information on goods and services, instead of relying on traditional methods such as television, radio, and magazines etc. (Schivinski and Dariusz, 2016). With the ever-increasing number of internet and social media users, it has become inevitable for major brands to understand online customer behavior. The emergence of social media has led to a subsequent change in media consumption which is pushing companies and organizations to adopt social media as one of their marketing strategies and public relation tools (Kaur, 2016). Therefore, social media has become an increasingly familiar platform employed in e-commerce

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to market services and resources to current and prospective customers.

From the view of Beynon-Davies (2004), e-commerce is the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to enable all trading activities, in the phases of pre-sale, sale execution, sale settlement and after sale. According to Song and Dong (2010) as cited in Kumah (2019), the transaction of information, products and services can all be seen as e-commerce.

A typical e-commerce transaction involves four major stages; the customer search stage (from the various social media platforms and e-commerce sites available), the ordering stage by the customer, the online payment stage for the goods and services and, finally, the delivery stage. Some other stages such as inquiry, complaints, returns of goods, etc., may, however, come in at some point within, or along the major stages of the e-commerce transaction.

It is, therefore, clear from the above that e-commerce involves the dissemination of pre-purchase information and post-sales services and support.

The social media have earlier been defined as platforms through which individuals express their opinions, wants, needs, values, and organizations thus relying on such platforms to understand their customers and seek innovative ways to meet their needs; information on price, product, and place are being communicated by brands to customers through these social media platforms that have the largest target audience. It is this feature (large audience) of social media pulling an incredible crowd that makes it such a viable medium as well as a mass medium suitable for online shopping. This salient feature can be credited with the wave of e-commerce that is bombarding our lives daily. Several fields in the online community have been used for e-commerce from websites, blogs, content creation and sharing sites, to games, applications and social networking sites all now carry one aspect of e-commerce or the other. Thirushen (2013) citing Needleman (2011) states that popular websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube have close to five million visitors daily and thus have to be considered as very important hubs for e-commerce.

With the advent of the Internet and the development of the social media, there is a paradigm shift in the control of communication and of course, e-commerce. The web has successfully handed 'power' of control from companies over to the customers thus further affirming that 'customer is king'. Hence, a customer decides what he/she wants to see, read, or listen to, so the companies compete in getting people's attention and delivering their messages. The good news is that when companies join these social networking sites, people can interact with the company and their products. This interaction makes users feel

personal because of their previous experiences with social media platforms. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, YouTube, Pinterest and blogs allow individual followers to "retweet" or "repost" comments made by the product being promoted. By repeating the message, all users, followers and clout are able to see the message, therefore reaching more people. Because the information about the product is being put out there and is getting repeated, more traffic is brought to the product/company.

The social media is one of the key decisive factors for the existence and growth of e-commerce. The growth of e-commerce requires reliable access to modern technologies which is typically lacking in most developing economies. Kuliya (2015) affirms that ICT's relevance in the growth of e-commerce cannot be over-emphasised because of mobile phones, computers, internet, and so on for us to use in our everyday life.

The social media not only direct shoppers toward a new product or an attractive deal, but engage with them and create a sense of community. A complete social media presence also includes direct sales through some networks, as well as having the back-end tools in place to let customers share products and recent purchases with friends and followers through just a single click.

Nigeria is among the African countries with the largest number of online shops. The most popular online shop in terms of visitor numbers is by far Jumia. Jumia is based in Lagos and operates in 12 African countries. Other popular online shops in Nigeria are Jiji, Konga, and Cheki. Konga.com, for instance, recorded some 30 million web visitors in 2019, which consisted mostly of a very young audience (Culture Intelligence, 2021).

According to recent reports by the World Bank, several factors are restraining the digital economy in Nigeria to fully embrace its potentials. Network coverage in rural areas is still poor and far from what is obtainable in urban cities of Nigeria. Despite these daunting challenges, e-commerce has been growing significantly in Nigeria. Online food retail and personal care rose by 50 percent, whereas the fashion and beauty sector experienced an increase of over 40 percent. The most valuable e-commerce sector in Nigeria was travel and accommodation, which achieved 3.2 billion U.S. dollars in consumer spending. Overall, the number of visitors in online marketplaces grew constantly, exceeding 250 million in 2019.

Theoretical Framework
The study is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) introduced by Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1989). It is an information systems theory that explains how users come to accept and use a technology. The model was used to predict user intention and usage by two important

items; perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The model suggests that when users are presented with a new technology, a number of factors influence their decision about how and when they will use it. These factors as posited by the Technology Acceptance Model are:

- *Perceived usefulness* (PU) – This was defined by Fred Davis as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance". It means whether or not someone perceives that technology to be useful for what they want to do.
- *Perceived ease-of-use* (PEOU) – Davis defined this as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free from effort" (Davis 1989). If the technology is easy to use, then the barriers conquered. If it's not easy to use and the interface is complicated, no one has a positive attitude towards it.

The TAM also suggests that the above factors have some external intervening variables such as individual differences, system characteristics, social influences, and facilitating conditions.

While the creator of a given technology product may believe the product is useful and user-friendly, it will not be accepted by its potential users unless the users share those beliefs.

While TAM has been criticized on a number of grounds, it serves as a useful general framework and has been consistent with a number of investigations into the factors that influence older adults' intention to use new technologies (Braun, 2013). Scholars such as Venkatesh and Bala (2008); Yousafzai, Foxall and Pallister (2007); Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis (2003) proved that TAM is robust and parsimonious as it is capable of explaining over 40% variance of users' attitude and behavior.

The model provides a traditional view point about technology acceptance from users' aspects; hence, it is vital in this study as e-commerce presents a new method of buying goods and services different from what was obtainable in the past. The question now is despite the fact that the people know about it, have they accepted and utilized it as a means of transacting their businesses.

Methodology
The survey research design is used as the research design for the study. The staff and regular students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State make up the population of the study. While the staff strength of FPNO stands at 3400, regular students are about 15250 students (Source: Registry Division, FPNO, 2021). So, the population for the study is 18650.
The researchers used the multi stage sampling and convenience sampling techniques to select 376 respondents as

sample. This was derived from Wimmer and Dominick sample size calculator with 95% confidence level and 5% confidence interval. For the students and to ensure that the population was well represented, three schools were selected from the five schools in the polytechnic through a lucky dip. From the three schools selected, three departments were selected from each school and the copies of the questionnaire were administered to those students available. For staff, copies of the questionnaire were administered to the Rectory, Registry, Bursary; it was also administered to academic members of staff that were available. Proportionally, the students received 306 copies of the questionnaire while the staff got 70 copies.

The research instrument for this study is a structured, two part questionnaire. The first section elicits demographic data; while the second section seeks data based on the research questions.

Data Presentation and Analysis of Results
Table 1: Demography of Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	95	26
	Female	270	74
Age	18-25 years	86	39.45
	26-35 years	193	45.87
	36-45 years	55	12.84
	46-60 years	24	
	Above 60 years	7	1.83
Highest level of education	ND/HND	297	81.4
	B.Sc/B.A/B.Ed	24	6.5
	M.Sc/M.A.	36	9.9
	PhD	8	2.2
Category	Staff	68	18.6
	Student	297	81.4
Total		365	100

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The responses from the questionnaire were received from 365 respondents. Data show that 26% are males and 74% females. Majority of the respondents are between 26 and 35 years old. This age group is the active workforce of any country. Data collected show that those who have ND/HND as their highest level of education constituted the majority of respondents while students constituted a greater percentage of the respondents.

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RESEARCH QUESTION 1: **What is the level of awareness of social media for ecommerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State?**

Table 2: Distribution of responses showing respondents use of the social media

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you use the social media?	Yes	363	99.5
	No	2	0.5
Total		**365**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The table shows that a majority of the respondents use the social media.

Table 3: Distribution of responses showing respondents engagement in ecommerce activities i.e. if they buy goods and services online.

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you engage in ecommerce activities?	Yes	288	79
	No	77	21
Total		**365**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 3 shows that majority of the respondents buy goods and services online.

Table 4: Distribution of responses showing respondents level of awareness of social media for ecommerce

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
To what level are you aware of the use of social media for ecommerce?	To a high level	278	76.2
	To a moderate level	56	15.3
	To a low level	30	8.2
	Not aware at all	1	0.3
Total		**365**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents have a high level of awareness about the use of social media for ecommerce.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: **To ascertain if staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State utilize social media for ecommerce activities?**

Table 5: Distribution of responses showing respondents utilization of social media for ecommerce activities

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you utilize the social media for your ecommerce activities?	Yes	285	78.1
	No	80	21.9
Total		**365**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 5 shows that majority of the respondents utilize the social media for ecommerce activities.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3:   Which social media platform do staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State prefer most for ecommerce?

Table 6:   Distribution of responses showing the social media platform that respondents prefer to use for ecommerce

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
If yes, which social media platform do you prefer most for ecommerce activities?	Facebook	211	57.8
	Pinterest	45	12.3
	Instagram	38	10.4
	Twitter	12	3.3
	YouTube	52	14.2
	WeChat	2	0.5
	Others	5	1.4
Total		**365**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 6 shows that Facebook is the most preferred social media platform used by respondents for ecommerce.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4:   What are the benefits derived from the use of social media for ecommerce by staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State?

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Table 7:   Distribution of responses showing the benefits respondents derive
from using social media in ecommerce

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What are the benefits you derive from using social media in ecommerce?	It helps me to discover new brands through adverts	97	26.6
	It helps me get shared opinions and experiences about brands from other users.	203	55.6
	It helps to simplify the shopping process and makes it very exciting.	13	3.6
	It enables product feedback	52	14.2
Total		**365**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 7 shows that most respondents use the social media for ecommerce because
it helps them get shared opinions and experiences about brands from other users.
This is in the form of reviews and ratings. Coming closely was the fact that it
helps them to discover new brands through adverts.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 5:   What are the challenges hampering the
use of social media in e-commerce among staff and students of Federal
Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State?**

Table 8: Distribution of responses showing the challenges faced by respondents in
using social media for ecommerce

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
What are the challenges you encounter while using social media for ecommerce?	Fear of cyber fraud	154	42.2
	Product not meeting expectations of the customer due to inability to assess the quality of the product online	162	44.4

Cumbersome description of product information and characteristics	13	3.6
Complex process for purchase	25	6.8
Unclear product images and videos	11	3
Total	**365**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table 8 shows that most of the respondents (162 representing 44.4%) see the inability of products bought online to meet their expectations because of failure to assess the quality of the product through the pictures or videos seen online as a major challenge. A large proportion of the population (154 representing 42.2%) also expressed fear of insecurity due to rising cases of cyber fraud emanating from ecommerce.

Discussion of Findings

The study set out to find out the awareness, utilization and perception of the use of social media in ecommerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State. Social media has been adjudged an indispensable tool for ecommerce, hence the study sought to find out the level of awareness, utilization and perception of social media for ecommerce among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State.

The study has five research questions coined from five research objectives. Data was collected via a structured questionnaire administered to 376 copies of questionnaire but 365 copies were considered valid.

Data collected show that there is a high level of awareness among staff and students of Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State. Most of them utilize the social media for ecommerce. Facebook emerged the most preferred social media for ecommerce among the respondents. Data also show that most respondents consider the social media beneficial in helping them get shared opinions and experiences about brands from other users. This is known as reviews and ratings in ecommerce. The challenges faced by the respondents in using the social media for ecommerce ranged basically from product not meeting expectations of the customer due to inability to assess the quality of the product online and fear of cyber fraud among other challenges.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers conclude that the awareness level of the respondents on the social media in ecommerce is very high; findings also reveal that they utilize the social media for ecommerce. Face book however emerged as the most preferred social media platform for ecommerce. The

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study also concludes that the major benefit derived from respondents in using social media for ecommerce is that it enables them to share opinions and experiences about brands from other users in the form of reviews and ratings. It is also obvious from the study that the use of social media in ecommerce is not devoid of its challenges which range from the fear and insecurity in the area of cyber fraud and the dissatisfaction that arises from the product not meeting the expectations of the customer when they eventually see the product physically etc.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:
a. Companies that engage in ecommerce should have a flexible payment plan. This might involve having pay on delivery system in place. This will take care of the pessimism of customers with regards to cyber crime.
b. The social media should be incorporated into the public relations (PR) strategy of organizations and companies that deal on ecommerce. PR entails getting people to talk and think about your business in a positive way. Social media provides a platform for customers to talk and socialize with each other. How the organization manages that platform and engages with

what the customers are saying is an important part of the organization's PR strategy.
c. For e-commerce to attain its full potential in Nigeria, the Federal and State Government must prioritise the tackling of infrastructure challenges and e-fraud challenges in particular.
d. Companies using the social media in ecommerce should explore automation tools. Automation is key to social selling because people expect timely and personal interaction on social media networks. It may be impossible to run a successful business and spend every waking moment online replying to comments and answering questions. The social media is like a front office personnel that is alert and ready to attend to customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so, these automation tools must be in place to avoid turning people away or missing crucial requests or concerns.
e. It is also important for advert professionals to use high-quality product images and videos with well-written product copy outlining features and benefits including the sizing or specifications on the product page.
f. There is a need to evaluate the organization's strategies so as to accurately analyze successes and know where and when to

improve. This can be done by choosing quantifiable metrics representing engagement (such as likes, shares, comments, or retweets). Track the website traffic and how much traffic emanate from the social media channels. Keep track of sales generated by social media marketing and sales completed online or through campaigns.

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