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Effect of Market and Entrepreneurial Orientation on Agricultural Cooperative Performance: The Mediating Role of Organizational Culture Evidence from Agricultural Cooperatives in Oromia Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

In today's rapidly changing and competitive business environment, adaptation and implementation of both market and entrepreneurial orientations have become critical determinants of agricultural cooperative performance. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of market and entrepreneurial orientations on agricultural cooperatives' performance (ACP), with organizational culture mediating the relationship in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the hypotheses from cross-sectional surveys, with data collected from 399 respondents across different cooperative levels. For the qualitative data, a total of 21 participants were used and analysed thematically using the MXQDA software. The results indicate that Entrepreneurial and market orientation have significant positive direct and indirect effects on agricultural cooperatives' performance. Organizational culture has a significant direct positive effect on ACP and positively mediates the relationship. In addition, descriptive results also reveal a moderate implementation of both market and entrepreneurial orientations by their dimensions. Moreover, interview results indicate that cooperatives have limited implementation of strategic orientation and core functions. Findings also reveal a lack of independent policy, autonomy, and value addition on members' products. The study suggests that cooperatives are expected to invest in indigenous social institutions as an intangible asset or social capital, in their organizational culture, market, and entrepreneurial orientation to enhance and maintain cooperatives' competitiveness and performance. Therefore, this study has theoretical, practical, and policy implications for cooperatives' strategic orientation and cooperative performance.

JEL Classifications: *Q13. P13. M31. L26. M14.*

1. Introduction

Market orientation (MO) and entrepreneurial orientation (EO) have long served as the primary engine in competitive advantage and organizational performance(Reyes-Gómez et al., 2025). MO improves the quality of products/services through gathering information about customers(Reyes-Gómez et al., 2025; Oliveira & Beuren, 2024; Sisay et al., 2023) and competitors' strategies(Maaodhah et al., 2021) to enhance organizational performance. EO encompasses the tendency to pursue new market opportunities(Siedlok et al., 2025) to develop new products and to compete in the market(Irawan et al., 2023). Nowadays, organizational culture (OC) serves as an intangible asset used for organizational competitiveness and performance. Firms with competitive OC have a powerful effect on the organization's performance(Samad et al., 2018; Cameron & Quinn, 1999). Research on strategic orientation (i.e MO and EO) shows a strong relation with firm economic performance (Löffel & Gmür, 2024; Schweiger et al., 2019). In the Ethiopian context, particularly in the Oromia region, agricultural cooperatives have not emphasized competition or have not balanced social and economic performance(Tolera Debisa, 2023).

However, the contributions of MO and EO have been extensively studied in profit-oriented organizations or IOFs(Kirca et al., 2005) but ignored in agricultural cooperatives. Strategic orientation and OC remain

underexplored in cooperatives due to the conceptualization of MO and EO around profit maximization(Kohli et al., 1993; Narver & Slater, 1990) and the structural rigidity and the cooperative dual paradox (Hartz et al., 2024). Although it has been overlooked individually and limited to integrating these constructs, some studies show an association among MO, EO, and cooperative performance (Kadek Diah Desita Giri et al., 2022; Siedlok et al., 2025; Sisay et al., 2023).

Hence, to address this paradox, we introduce a novel operationalization of the constructs and emphasize their integration rather than competing or complementing for competitive advantage and agricultural cooperatives' performance (ACP) in the following areas. This study examines the pertinence of this strategic orientation and has been wrongly overlooked for agricultural cooperatives. It also establishes integrative strategic orientation and OC by leveraging domestic social capital for ACP. Moreover, it shows the relevance of MO and EO to the cooperatives' dual objectives performance (Hartz et al., 2024). Therefore, the novel objective of the study is to reveal and operationalize the significant association of MO, EO, and OC in agricultural cooperatives' performance, as described in section 2.2.

2. Related Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical foundations and cooperative performance

This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives. Social capital theory (SCT) is related to the role of Ethiopian social institutions called “Iqub”, “Edir”, “Mehaber”, “Dabo”, and “jigi” as intangible social capital or assets (Valentinov & Iliopoulos, 2021; Putnam, 1994) to solve the “social and economic” problems of the members. The RBV posits that cooperatives achieve sustained competitive advantage through these social institutions that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIO). Paradox theory suggests that high-performing cooperatives do not choose between social and economic goals (Benos et al., 2016) for ACP. Hence, this study extends the integration of RBV, SCT, and paradox theory. Farmers' social capital (VRIO) enables the integration of strategic orientation and OC for the cooperatives' competitiveness and organizational performance.

2.2 Empirical review and hypothesis development

2.2.1 Market orientation (MO) and agricultural cooperatives' performance (ACP)

Effects of MO in cooperatives have been ignored. Most literature is used in the business sector. MO and its dimensions have been positively associated with firms' and/or cooperatives’ performance (Irawan et al., 2023; Grashuis & Ye, 2019; Sisay et al., 2023). ButSisay et al. (2023) found that cooperatives’ competitor orientation did not contribute to higher business performance. Based on these inconsistent findings, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: MO is expected to exhibit a significant direct positive effect on ACP

2.2.2 Market orientation (MO), Organizational culture (OC) and ACP

MO is widely seen as a tool for an organization to build and to improve its competitive advantage. MO is a social and behavioural concept that drives firms to develop new products to gain a competitive advantage, thereby enhancing organizational performance (Karaev & Mercan, 2023; Grashuis & Ye, 2019; Gnizy et al., 2014). Cooperatives' social capital is an engine to implement MO to leverage competitiveness and ACP.

H2: MO is expected to exhibit a significant direct positive effect on organizational Culture.

H3: MO is expected to exhibit a significant indirect positive effect on ACP through the mediating role of OC.

2.2.3 Organizational Culture (OC) and Agricultural cooperative performance

Even though there is limited research on the cooperative sector, OC acts as glue between the strategic orientations (MO and EO) and organizational performance (Ding & Hong, 2025; Ghani, 2025), revealing a positive relationship.

H4: OC has a significant direct positive effect on agricultural cooperative performance (ACP).

H5: OC mediates the relationship between (MO&EO) and ACP.

2.2.4 Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and AC performance

Nonetheless, EO and organizational performance reveal diverse results(Masa'deh et al., 2018).Aliyu et al. (2025) have shown a negative relation between innovation and business performance. However, the majority of the literature suggests a positive relation with organizational performance (Siedlok et al., 2025; Bonney & Miles, 2020).

H6: EO has a significant direct positive effect on agricultural cooperative performance.

2.2.5 Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) and organizational culture

Kadek Diah Desita Giri et al., (2022)found a positive relation between EO, OC and organizational performance. There is a positive relation between EO and OC and organizational performance (Karaev & Mercan, 2023; Ding & Hong, 2025).

H7: EO has a significant direct positive effect on organizational culture.

H8: EO has a significant indirect positive effect on ACP through organizational culture.

3. Methods and Data

A quantitative research design was adopted using a cross-sectional survey. This approach is appropriate for testing theoretically derived hypotheses about relationships among latent constructs across a large population.

3.1 Study population and sampling method

To fulfil the objectives of the study, data of both qualitative and quantitative nature were collected from both primary and secondary sources by selecting 399 respondents from cooperative members, employees, and management, and 21 participants were selected from different levels of cooperatives for the interview. For details, see Table A1. Given in Appendix A in a separate supplementary file.

3.1.1 Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), which is suitable for confirming complex theoretical models with multiple latent variables and mediating relationships(Hair et al., 2017), to test the hypothesized relationships complemented by qualitative data analyzed through MAXQDA, followed by thematic analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

From the descriptive data shown in Table A2, the mean of MO was 2.824; EO was 2.840; OC was 2.856, and agricultural cooperative performance was 2.894, which fell in the interval of '2.50 to 3.49'. This result shows that the overall extent of agricultural cooperative performance (ACP) would be described as 'to some extent', which corresponds to the third anchor defined by Pornell and colleagues (Pornell& Saldaña, 2013). This suggests that respondents hold some reservations or are moderate in the implementation of MO, EO, and OC for ACP. See Table A2 given in Appendix A in a separate supplementary file.

4.2 Assessment of the measurement model

The model demonstrates strong convergent and discriminant validity. As indicated in Table A4 in Appendix A, both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha for the measurement model exceed 0.70 to be considered acceptable(Pesämaa et al., 2021). The average variance extracted (AVE) was above 0.50 for each, confirming convergent validity. Fornell and Larcker criterion and HTMT were less than 0.85, and the discriminant validity measurement model was deemed adequate. See Appendix A of Table A5 and A6.

4.3 Multicollinearity and Factor Loading

For this study, the presence of collinearity and the variance inflation factor (VIF) was checked. Accordingly, all items have VIF values less than 10 in the acceptable range, indicating the strength of the relationships(Hair et al., 2019). In addition, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was greater than 0.716. Therefore, VIF, communality, KMO, and TVE are within the acceptable range, suggesting that the model fits the data well. See Table A7. Given in Appendix A.

4.4 Structural Models and Hypothesis Testing

Maximum Likelihood estimation was used to calculate the model. Accordingly, the model's goodness-of-fit indices were excellent ($p > 0.05$, RMSEA < 0.08, GFI > 0.90, SRMR < 0.08, TLI > 0.90, and CFI > 0.95), indicating a strong fit between the proposed model and the empirical data. The results are summarized in Fig. 2 and Table A1.

As can be seen from Table 1 below, all the direct path hypotheses were supported. Market orientation (MO) was significantly and positively associated with agricultural cooperative performance (ACP) ($b = 0.301$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. MO was positively associated with organizational culture (OC) ($b = 0.588$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Similarly, entrepreneurial orientation (EO) has a significant direct positive effect on ACP ($b = 0.175$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3; EO on OC ($b = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H4. Also, OC has a significant direct positive effect on ACP ($b = 0.511$, $p > 0.001$), supporting H5.

The indirect effect of MO and EO on ACP via OC was significant ($B = 0.302$, $p < 0.01$; $b = 0.177$, $p < 0.01$), respectively. Supporting H6, H7, and H8. Hence, both the direct and indirect effects are significant and point in the same direction, indicating the model demonstrates complementary partial mediation, which is common in complex structural models (Ledermann et al., 2025).

Table 1

Assessment of the model results

Hypothesized relationships	**Model result**					
	ß	**Confidence intervals**		**T-values**	**P-values**	**Decision**
Direct effect	2.50%	97.50%				
MO →ACP (*H1*)	0.301	0.231	0.372	6.966	0.000	Accepted
MO → OC (*H2*)	0.588	0.446	0.744	4.805	0.000	Accepted
EO→ACP(H3)	0.175	0.091	0.247	3.250	0.000	Accepted
EO→OC(H4)	0.342	0.190	0.480	7.739	0.000	Accepted
OC →ACP (*H5*)	0.511	0.476	0.548	9.677	0.000	Accepted
Indirect effect (Mediation)	0.302	0.231	0.372	-	0.000	Accepted
MO→OC→ACP(H6**)**	0.177	0.096	0.247	-	0.000	Accepted
EO→OC→ACP (H7)	0.927	0.272	0.377	-	0.000	Accepted
MO&EO→OC→ACP(H8)	0.558	0.446	0.744		-	-
Total effect	0.342	0.190 -	0.480		-	-
MO→OC	0.601		-			
EO→OC	0.350	-	-			
MO→OC→ACP(H6)						
EO→OC→ACP (H7)						
R-square value	**0.918**					
Agricultural Cooperative perf (ACP)						
Organizational Culture (OC)	**0.837**					
Effect size (Cohen's $f2$) → variable	RE^2	RI^2-RE^2	RI^2-RE^2/1-RI^2	Weak effect		
(RI^2=0.918), 1-RI^2=0.082 MO	0.907	0.011				
EO	0.906	0.012	0.134	Weak effect		
OC	0.895	0.023	0.146	Weak effect		

Source: Authors' construct, 2026

Note: MO= Market orientation, EO= Entrepreneurial orientation, OC = Organizational culture; ACP= agricultural cooperatives performance.

Hypothesized relationships	Model result				
	ß	Confidence intervals	T-values	P-values	Decision
		0.280			
Model Fit: CMIN/Df = 2.315, GFI = 0.969, TLI=.966, CFI = 0.978, SRMR = 0.015, RMSEA = 0.056					
Source: Authors' construct, 2026					
Note: MO= Market orientation, EO= Entrepreneurial orientation, OC = Organizational culture; ACP= agricultural cooperatives performance.					

5. Discussion

The results show that market orientation (MO), Entrepreneurial orientation (EO), and organizational culture (OC) directly, significantly, and positively predict agricultural cooperative performance (ACP) with the values of (β = 0.301; β = 0.175; β = 0.511), supporting H1, H3, and H5, respectively. This indicates that market-oriented, entrepreneurial-oriented, and socio-economic-oriented organizational culture create competitiveness and enhance ACP. These findings align with several studies (Sisay et al., 2023; Grashuis & Ye, 2019). The combined influence of MO, EO, and OC on ACP has produced an R^2 value of 0.918, whereas the influence of MO and EO on OC has R^2 value of 0.837. This suggests that EO, MO, and OC explain 91.8% of the variance in ACP and are substantial (Mia et al., 2019). But the incremental effect size at the individual level for MO or EO is in the weak range (f^2 =0.134 to 0.280). The overall fit of the model was good CMIN/Df = 2.315, GFI = 0.969, TLI = 0.966, CFI = 0.978, SRMR = 0.015, RMSEA = 0.056. Crucially, the significant indirect effects (β = 0.302) and (β = 0.177) for MO and EO, respectively, provide evidence that OC acts as a complementary partial mediator, amplifying the positive association between strategic orientation and ACP. These findings have the potential to leverage cooperatives' competitive advantage and enhance ACP. Our results are supported by prior empirical literature linking orientation (i.e MO, EO) and organizational performance (Haswardi Morshidi & Mohd Yusoff, 2024; Margaretha & Suryana, 2023; Asad et al., 2020). RBV and social capital theory support the implementation of MO and EO as strategic assets for organizational performance (Karaev & Mercan, 2023). Our findings confirm that indigenous social institutions "Dabo, Jigi…" which are intangible social assets, are the solution for the cooperative identity paradox when effectively implementing the MO and EO. This is consistent with the theoretical expectations.

The empirical insights gathered from 21 key informants reveal a critical strategic orientation gap. Empirical evidence points to twofold constraints on cooperative performance: First, cooperatives are hindered by a profound market misalignment, characterized by external manipulation, depleted bargaining power, and minimal operational autonomy. Second, they exhibit a critical deficiency in having separate cooperative policies. Cooperatives' marketing frameworks lack customer and competitor

orientation and are confined to the collection and selling of members' products, bypassing value addition.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of market orientation (MO) and entrepreneurial orientation (EO) on Agricultural cooperatives' performance (ACP) through organizational culture (OC). Accordingly, all the proposed hypotheses (H1-H7) were supported. Findings indicate that MO and EO are engines for ACP but are overlooked in cooperatives. Integrating MO, EO, and OC enhances ACP. Organizational culture is a partial complementary mediator for MO, EO, and ACP. The central message of this study is that integration of MO and EO alone is insufficient; creating OC that encourages cooperative socio-economic objectives is important. The quantitative data demonstrated a moderate-to-strong correlation across variables, with mean scores consistently ranging from 2.50 to 3.49. A moderate implementation of both MO and EO dimensions, that corroborate and validate the qualitative insight. This suggests that agricultural cooperatives in Oromia regions have strategic orientation deficiency. Integration of MO and EO through the mediation pathway of OC in a competitive environment that extends the RBV to the cooperative level, enriched by social capital theory and paradox theory. Hence, upgrading and investing in OC and local indigenous social institution called “Iqub”, “Edir”, “Mehaber”, “Dabo”, and “jigi” as intangible social capital for the effective implementation and integration of MO and EO supports competition to enhance ACP.

Implications

This study has significant implications for the theory, empirical, and practice of agricultural cooperatives. Theoretically, it not only supports the RBV but also enriches it by showing how cooperatives' indigenous social capital, as a VRIO asset, is reinforced through social capital theory (SCT) and paradox theory (PT). This extends our understanding of how cooperatives can build and maintain sustainable competitive advantages(Barney, 1991). By integrating the RBV with SCT and PT, we create a more robust and holistic theoretical framework to understand ACP. This establishes how these theories complement and mutually reinforce each other for the sector. Our findings also strongly support the role of OC in mediating the association of MO and EO on ACP. Empirically, these findings show the overlooking of MO and EO for competitive advantage and ACP. From a practical standpoint, this study offers valuable recommendations to members, managers, and agricultural cooperative leaders to invest in MO, EO, OC, and their dimensions that promote competitiveness and enhance ACP by providing comprehensive training at different cooperative levels. It also suggests policymakers develop a separate cooperatives policy. From a methodological standpoint, this study highlights the successful application of CB-SEM as a valuable method for studying complex mediation relationships in cooperatives.

Limitation and Future research directions

Due to the scope and nature of the study, it has three major limitations: First, there are different types of cooperatives, but this study is limited to agricultural cooperatives in the region. Future studies should investigate other types of cooperatives. Second, we employed a cross-sectional design and cannot definitively establish causality; Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs. Third, the study was conducted in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. The generalizability of these findings to all parts of Ethiopia requires further investigation. Finally, the model did not include all strategic orientations and variables that influence ACP. Future research should explore these as potential moderators or additional mediators and other external factors.

Key Questions Reflecting Applicability in Real Life

1. How can agricultural cooperatives (AC) strategically integrate, leverage, and practice market orientation (MO) and entrepreneurial orientation (EO) to remain competitive and enhance organizational performance?
2. What organizational changes, leadership practices, and initiatives should cooperatives cultivate to improve AC performance and competitiveness?
3. How can future cooperative practitioners, leaders, members, and stakeholders design a competitive landscape that enhances ACP and sustainability; and also, how can policymakers design a separate enabling policy cooperative framework?

Declarations

Author Contribution

Lemmi : Writing review & editing, Writing original draft, Software, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. Chalchissa : Writing review & editing, Writing original draft, Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. Abiot : Writing review & editing, Writing original draft Validation, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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Figures

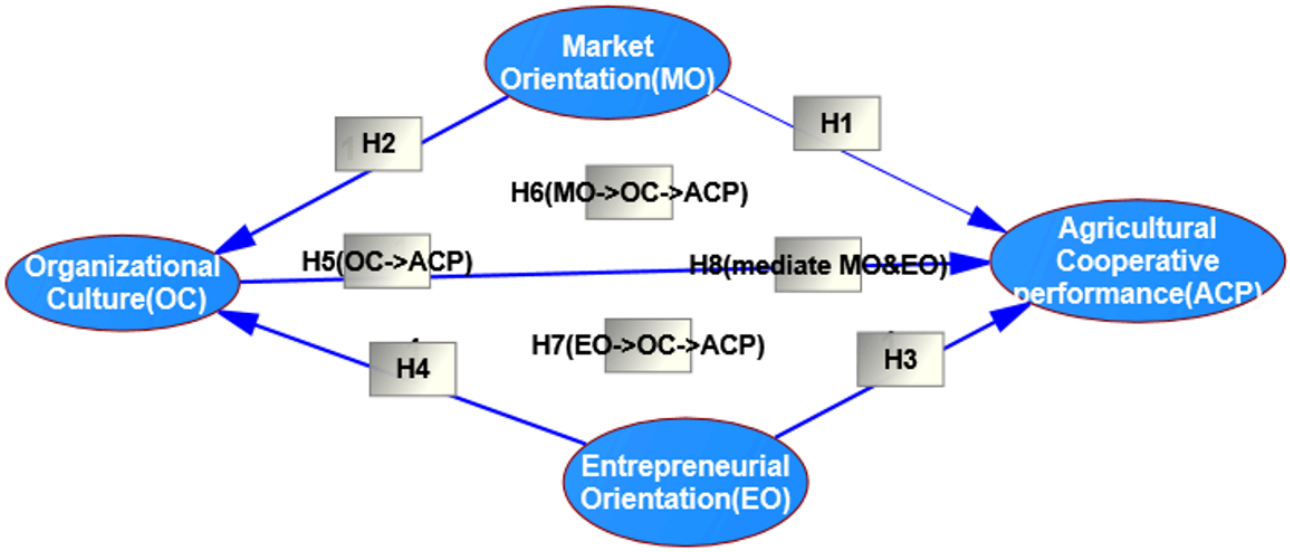


Figure 1

Proposed hypothetical model of the study

Source: Authors' construct, 2026

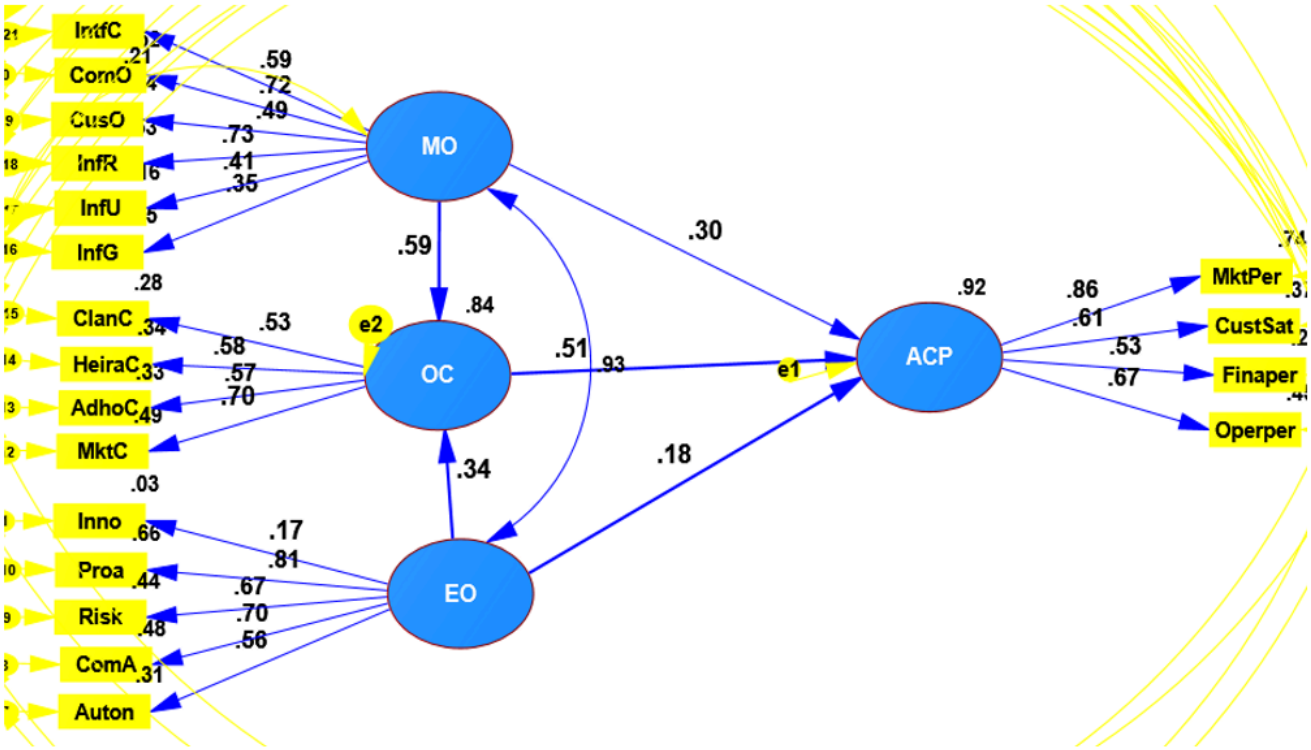


Figure 2

Path analysis

Source: Authors' construct, 2026

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