



Received: 04-01-2024  
Accepted: 14-02-2024

## International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

### Optimizing Class Decor: A Grounded Theory on Student Motivation in Classroom Environments

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#### Abstract

The Department of Education has directly ordered schools to keep classroom walls bare and to "take out everything" on them, including traditional educational posters and other visual teaching aids. This research explores the impact of removing classroom decorations on elementary students' participation and learning outcomes from the perspective of students themselves. A qualitative descriptive design was used to gain insights into the presence or absence of decorations in the classroom. Fifteen (15) randomly selected students were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview. Data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis that resulted in five themes. It was found

that students feel that a minimalist classroom with fewer decorations uplifts students' concentration, participation, and overall learning experience. They appreciate reduced distractions and a calmer learning atmosphere. In conclusion, students' perceptions suggest that removing excessive decorations from the classroom can benefit their participation and learning outcomes. Based on these findings, we recommend that educators and school administrators consider adopting a more minimalist approach to classroom decorations, keeping students' concentration and engagement in mind.

**Keywords:** Classroom Decor, Student Perception, Elementary Education, Minimalist Design, Learning Environment

#### 1. Introduction

Henry (2003) believes that the school aims to develop every aspect of a child's life at the heart of education. Understanding how classroom aesthetics affect young learners' ability to focus and their overall educational achievements is a valuable research endeavor. According to Cortes (2011) <sup>[5]</sup>, school success is measured not only by student outcomes, but also by the extent to which they utilize their human, technological, and infrastructural resources that transcend the successful instructional academic teaching-learning process. The minimalistic design promotes a sense of calm and aids concentration, while others speculate it might leave students needing more visual stimulation. This topic can provide valuable insights into creating more conducive learning environments for students, potentially enhancing their educational experiences and prospects.

This research emphasizes the positive influence of such design on attention and learning outcomes among elementary students. While some research may offer insights into the effects of minimalistic classroom design in specific cultural contexts (Grey, 2016) <sup>[10]</sup>. There is a need for more cross-cultural research to understand whether these findings hold universally or vary significantly based on cultural factors, such as in Cebu, Philippines. Furthermore, the existing literature offers valuable insights, revealing a notable gap in our understanding and a series of unanswered questions.

The researchers from Cebu underline the importance of creating conducive learning spaces. This regional perspective mirrors broader global trends, highlighting the universal relevance of this educational topic. Researchers delve into the body of research, and it becomes increasingly apparent that the impact of classroom design knows no borders. These findings in Cebu encourage researchers to dive deeper into the captivating domain of how classroom aesthetics influence elementary students' educational experiences.

In the local context of Cebu, removing a minimalistic classroom design for elementary students can be seen as a detrimental decision. Minimalistic designs have been praised for creating a focused and uncluttered learning environment, which is particularly beneficial for young learners. Education in the twenty-first century, according to (Boholano *et al.* 2011), emphasizes globalization. This means that the patterns of goods and services given in the workplace are decided by how

successfully and efficiently the knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected by global standards, as well as the technology-based competitive advantages demanded by global standards, are applied. Removing this design approach may lead to increased distractions in the classroom, with colorful decorations, excessive furniture, and visual clutter potentially diverting students' attention away from their studies. This shift in classroom aesthetics might decrease attention spans and learning outcomes as students struggle to concentrate in an environment that no longer promotes simplicity and focus.

Moreover, removing minimalistic classroom design may have broader implications for the well-being of elementary students. Research has shown that minimalistic designs can reduce stress levels among students, creating a calm and peaceful atmosphere conducive to learning. By eliminating this design principle, students may experience heightened stress and anxiety in a visually chaotic environment, which could further hinder their ability to learn effectively. Moreover, eliminating minimalist classroom design could adversely affect elementary students' attention and overall learning outcomes, potentially compromising their educational experience and well-being.

Teachers who are still looking for valuable teaching resources for arts-based teaching and learning, according to Inocian (2018), may find it useful to understand how changes in classroom aesthetics affect children's attention and learning performance while establishing the best learning environments for primary school children. The study's findings may add to the body of information on the relationship between classroom design and student performance by exploring the effects of changing classroom aesthetics, specifically by removing minimalistic aspects.

There is a limited understanding of how changing classroom aesthetics affects elementary children's attention and learning outcomes, particularly moving away from minimalist design. According to Ensao *et al.* (2022) <sup>[7]</sup>, a student's attention span is a crucial aspect of the learning process. The amount of information retained by a student from a class is determined by the amount of time he or she spends listening to and comprehending the teacher. Hence, this study aims to shed light on the significance of taking classroom aesthetics into account when encouraging excellent educational results and to look into how primary school children's attention and learning results may alter if a minimalist classroom design is abandoned.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

Grounded theory is a research design that seeks to develop a theory through systematic data gathering and analysis. It entails an iterative process of data gathering, coding, and theory construction, allowing researchers to gain new insights and understandings about a topic. Glaser and Strauss met in 1960 and collaborated on a research project that resulted in the publication of their seminal work, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, in 1967. Their goal was to propose a rigorous qualitative research technique that would allow for systematic data collecting, coding, and data analysis to generate grounded theory—theory that is connected to and anchored in an inductive examination of evidence. To produce meanings, categories, and grounded theory, showcasing the versatile application of grounded theory in

diverse research contexts, including efforts to enhance primary children's learning experiences and outcomes Centillas, *et al* (2023) <sup>[4]</sup>, the researcher employs the constant comparative analysis approach. This study uses a grounded theory research approach to improve primary children's learning experiences and outcomes by improving their classroom environment.

### 2.2 Sampling Design, Respondents, and Environment

To ensure fairness and minimize bias, stratified selection will be used to choose college students in Cebu City, followed by random sampling to select 10-15 student respondents from these selected schools. According to Thomas (2023), stratified sampling entails dividing a population into homogeneous subpopulations called strata based on specific characteristics and then using a different probability sampling method for each stratum to improve study generalizability and validity while addressing diverse population characteristics and avoiding under-coverage bias. In this case, the researcher chose students from a specific school in Cebu City who firmly understood the impact of removing classroom decorations on elementary students, employing stratified sampling to select participants capable of contributing valuable insights to this study.

### 2.3 Research Instrument

The researcher is frequently the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The qualitative research instrument for this study includes a semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions designed to elicit college students' subjective experiences, emotions, and perceptions regarding the removal of classroom decorations and their influence on their attention and learning outcomes. A semi-structured interview guide was used in this study to elicit subjective experiences, emotions, and perceptions from college students (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These interviews aim to provide a deeper understanding of how students interpret and respond to changes in their learning environment.

### 2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

A list of questions should be prepared before conducting a semi-structured interview. These questions are suited to the interview topic and should be open-ended for a more in-depth conversation. The Research Ethics Committee must have approved this questionnaire. The next step is carefully picking the interviewee to ensure the interview results are relevant and valuable. Following that, informed consent and approval from the participant will be obtained before the interview. The interview will be recorded on audio or video, with consent, to ensure accurate transcription and analysis of interview data. The interviewer explains himself and the aim of the interview during the interview and explains the structure of the interview; the interviewee will be informed that the interview will be a semi-structured guide designed to encourage students to share their experiences and perspectives regarding the removal of minimalistic classroom design and its effects on their attention and learning outcomes. I will ask each of the questions on your list to listen to the responses and, if necessary, ask follow-up questions. At the end of the interview, thank the interviewee for their time and ask if they have any more questions or remarks, then ensure that ethical considerations, including confidentiality and the well-being of participants, will be

closely adhered to throughout the interview process.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method researchers use to arrange and analyze large amounts of data systematically. It is a search for themes that capture the tales in data sets. It identifies themes by carefully reading and re-reading the transcribed material (King, 2004; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). This method is used in the context of "A Student Perception of Removing Classroom Decorations Influencing Elementary Students' Participation and Learning Outcomes," it entails a rigorous study of acquired data, such as surveys or interviews with students, to understand their thoughts and experiences. Thematic analysis is the systematic identification, analysis, and organization of recurring themes and narratives within collected data, such as surveys or interviews, to understand better student perspectives on the impact of removing classroom decorations on elementary students' participation and learning outcomes. In essence, when applied to this study, Thematic Analysis helps researchers extract significant information from student perspectives in a structured and ordered manner. It aids in discovering repeating themes and sentiments, allowing for a more thorough knowledge of the potential consequences of changing classroom decorations on elementary students' educational experiences. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that consists of numerous steps. The steps involved in constructing a grounded theory involved several steps Chamaz (2014). Researchers must first gather rich and diverse data through interviews, observations, or document analysis. Following that, they begin coding, identifying concepts or categories within the data to capture important ideas and patterns. Memos are necessary for recording reflections and interpretations during the coding process. Theoretical sampling is then used to pick additional data sources or participants based on emerging hypotheses or areas that need more investigation. Continuous coding and analysis necessitates regularly comparing codes, categories, and notes, as well as refining and expanding concepts. The goal is to approach theoretical saturation, at which point no new information or insights emerge from the data. Following that, integration and writing take place, intending to create a coherent and thorough grounded theory narrative that explains the phenomenon under investigation. To establish credibility and rigor, validation through member checks, peer review, or expert feedback is essential. Overall, flexibility and openness are required throughout the iterative process of developing grounded theories.

## 2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are critical in any research project because they protect the well-being and rights of participants. Several ethical factors will be considered in this research on the perception of removing classroom decorations and its impact on elementary kids' participation and learning results. It includes gaining informed consent from parents or legal guardians by explaining the study's goal, procedures, potential dangers, and benefits. Obtaining consent from the children themselves will be a critical ethical factor in this research project. Before participation, the child participants will be asked to provide age-appropriate consent by explaining the objective of the study, the procedures involved, and any potential risks or benefits. The assent process will guarantee that children understand their

involvement in the research and can indicate their willingness to participate. Participants will receive a token of appreciation worth 20 pesos. Furthermore, they all have the opportunity to win prizes, including school materials, through our raffle draw as an alternative way to reward for their valuable contributions. Next, all data obtained will be anonymized and securely kept to protect students and their families identity and personal information. Furthermore, the research findings will be converse clearly and honestly, ensuring that the data gathered will be presented unbiased and objectively. Finally, an institutional review board or ethics committee will conduct an ethical evaluation of the research to ensure that it satisfies the relevant ethical standards and norms and assures participants' rights and welfare.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Theme 1: Enchanting Learning Spaces

The impact of aesthetically pleasing and thoughtfully chosen classroom decorations on the overall learning experience is the main focus of the "Enchanting Learning Spaces" theme (Barraza, 2021). The results demonstrated that the chosen Elementary students expressed a variety of positive sentiments regarding the theme. This includes vibrant colors, interactive displays, and a carefully planned environment to create a positive and engaging atmosphere. Furthermore, the motivational component was acknowledged, as one respondent expressed inspiration and amazement from creative work.

*"Personally, for me, it is uplifting because, when we are in the classroom, we are normally bombarded with much knowledge.*

*So, it is nice that from time to time, there is something that can divert our attention..."- Informant 1*

*"Decorations create a positive and enlightened mood, especially in contrast ..." -Informant 2*

*"It is relaxing when the room has minimalist decorations..." -Informant 3*

*"I am amazed because I am attracted to creative work, so that is why it motivates me to engage with the decorations..." - Informant 4*

*"Shows the teacher's creativity, and at the same time, you can see how they want their classroom to be creative. The classroom environment is very friendly, especially in our elementary department. To see a classroom with a colorful environment where we can express ourselves..." - Informant 5*

*"An engaging and comfortable learning environment and their presence can influence a student's decision to attend the school actively..." - Informant 6*

*"If It is entertaining to the eyes, like, it's exciting to see, but if it is too much, it can be distracting..." - Informant 7*

*"I like to study; it is like the place is peaceful..." - Informant 8*

*"The only difference is that I feel more ordered, and it forces you to think more carefully..." - Informant 9*

*"There is an impact on my learning experience because my skills especially enhanced my reading skills..." - Informant 10*

The informants mentioned that enchanted learning environments have a positive effect on people in the classroom. They emphasize the value of creativity in instruction and student expression and link these settings to inspiration, motivation, and relaxation. According to these results, having a creative and visually appealing learning environment enhances students' educational experiences. Sweden (2020) confirms that active learning environments improve students' general well-being and have a positive impact on academic performance. This theme emphasizes that unpleasant aspects do not have to control the entire learning process and promotes a stylish approach to overcoming such obstacles. Through the application of creativity to reduce feelings of boredom and sustain engagement, people can effectively navigate challenges and turn potential setbacks into opportunities for learning and personal growth. It is advised that educators take into account the significance of designing enchanted learning environments in light of these responses. This could entail adding eye-catching and interactive decorations that create a happy environment and might boost motivation and engagement among the students. Subsequent investigations may examine particular design components that work best to accomplish this objective.

### **Theme 2: Navigating Challenges in Style**

The focus of this exploration of the theme "Navigating Challenges in Style" concerning classroom decorations is on the possible detrimental effects that overbearing or distracting elements may have on the educational setting. According to Flynn (2018), classroom décor has a big impact on students' motivation, engagement, and overall learning experience. Elementary respondents voiced concerns about how distracting overly decorated spaces can be and suggested that simple arrangements are preferable to elaborate ones. The comments draw attention to the drawbacks of an uninspired environment, implying that it could negatively affect the general mood of the classroom and lower motivation and engagement levels. The informants expressed that a classroom with few decorations could be viewed as ugly and visually unappealing, which could have an impact on students' behavior and the lively atmosphere of the space.

*"Excessive decorations can be distracting for students. I feel that having minimal decorations is better compared to extravagant ones..." - Informant 1*

*"An uninspiring classroom might drag down the overall atmosphere. So, there might be some impact at some point..." - Informant 2*

*"Entering a classroom with fewer decorations or none is like a blank canvas, making it mentally blank for me. It may not appear lively..." - Informant 3*

*"Students might be distracted by numerous classroom decorations.*

*If there are too many decorations, students might wander instead of focusing on listening to the teacher..." - Informant 4*

*"A classroom with minimal decorations is unpleasant and not visually pleasant..." - Informant 5*

*"As a child, minimal decorations might affect behavior, making it less lively..." - Informant 6*

Overall, the responses show that participants generally agree that too many decorations can be distracting and may negatively affect the atmosphere of the classroom. Furthermore, the preference for simple decorations points to a need for a classroom environment that is both visually appealing and more focused. These opinions are in line with the body of knowledge regarding how classroom aesthetics affect student learning. Attia (2017) agrees that an excessively adorned or disorganized space impedes concentration and focus, corroborating the respondents' apprehensions regarding diversion and possible detrimental consequences on conduct. This emphasizes how crucial it is to take into account the aesthetic elements of classroom décor to establish a supportive learning environment. To maintain an engaging and motivating learning environment, educators should be mindful of the quantity and style of decorations. This suggests that educators should find a balance that stimulates interest without overwhelming students. To foster a productive and positive learning environment, it is imperative to strike a balance between aesthetic appeal and functionality. This could entail teacher-student collaboration as well as taking into account findings from previous studies on the aesthetics of classrooms.

### **Theme 3: Harmony in Education**

Harmony in education emphasizes the significance of creating a peaceful and conducive learning environment through the thoughtful and balanced decoration selection of a classroom. The general view among respondents was that carefully set and well-chosen decorations support a well-rounded learning environment. They recommended that decorations be chosen with necessity and purpose in mind, avoiding unnecessary elements that might not enhance students' learning.

*"Limited and carefully chosen decorations are suggested for a balanced learning environment..."\* - Informant 1*

*"It is necessary to pick decorations for the classroom; sometimes, there are unnecessary things to put in the classroom. For example, display boards in elementary school can be expensive, but it is not necessary..."\* - Informant 2*

*"Should be carefully chosen and limited to benefit students' learning. This ensures that the decorations serve an educational purpose..."\* - Informant 3*

*"Carefully chosen, not necessarily limited, to cater to the diverse needs of students. If classrooms are overly*



*decorated, it may not make sense for the children's learning. So, for me, the design in the classroom should be carefully chosen, considering the diverse needs of students..."\* - Informant 4*

*"Decorations inside the classroom is a nice concept because why not employ that kind of arrangement if it is for the benefit of the students? They would have more incentive to perform well..."\* - Informant 5*

*"Suggested for a balanced learning environment..."\* - Informant 6*

*"Decorations are crucial for an engaging and comfortable learning environment, and their presence can influence a student's decision..."\* - Informant 7*

It demonstrates that informants generally agreed on how important it is to choose decorations carefully to create a peaceful and productive learning environment. A desire for a deliberate and well-rounded approach is suggested by the decoration's emphasis on necessity and purpose. Their opinions align with the larger body of education research that highlights the significance of a well-designed learning environment. Kierwa (2016) and Matthew (2006) confirm the beneficial effects of well-selected decorations on the educational process. The pivotal role of the physical environment in shaping educational experiences resonates with the broader understanding that well-designed surroundings contribute significantly to the learning process. The idea that the physical surroundings influence education is reflected in the theme, emphasizing the necessary discussion on how creating conducive learning spaces is essential for fostering effective education. The implications of these responses suggest that educators and institutions should prioritize the thoughtful selection of decorations to create an environment that promotes learning. This may involve considering the diverse needs of students and ensuring that decorations align with educational objectives. The emphasis on a balanced approach implies that an optimal learning environment is achieved when aesthetics and functionality are harmonized carefully.

#### **Theme 4: Artful Boundaries and Creativity**

The idea that boundaries and deliberate selections lead to a better learning environment is the foundation of the context of classroom decorations. The notion that restrictions on the type and amount of decorations are necessary to guarantee a significant influence on students' perceptions. Various informants put on the need to keep decorations to a minimum, saying things like "It must be limited. A lot of students might be distracted by numerous classroom decorations." Others acknowledge the appropriateness of decorations, saying things like "Decorations could be appropriate, and create a pleasant environment..."

*"It must be limited. A lot of students might be distracted by numerous classroom decorations. If there are too many decorations, students might wander instead of focusing on listening to the teacher..."\* - Informant 1*

*"Decorations could be appropriate, and create a pleasant environment..."\* - Informant 2*

*"Teachers should set limits on decorations to ensure they are meaningful and can positively influence students' future perceptions and questions about themselves. The decorations should be environmentally friendly..."\* - Informant 3*

This refers to the idea that keeping decorations within reason is crucial to preserving a concentrated and supportive learning environment. Limiting decorations is in line with Rands (2017) [18] educational theory that says better focus and engagement are fostered by a carefully balanced environment. The topic of discussion could extend to the psychological aspects of how a well-thought-out and aesthetically pleasing classroom can enhance student participation and behavior. This discusses research showing better learning outcomes and concentration in an intentionally decorated, clutter-free environment. It suggests that teachers should have a tactical approach when it comes to decorating their classrooms, establishing appropriate boundaries, and selecting décor that will benefit their students. This can entail giving educators instructions on how to design a purposeful and well-balanced visual environment that improves instruction without becoming overly demanding for the students. Furthermore, the sustainability objectives in education could be aligned with the eco-friendliness of decorations.

#### **Theme 5: Inspiration Oasis**

According to the context of classroom decorations, students' perceptions and engagement are greatly influenced by the presence of visually appealing and motivating aspects in the learning environment. The informants shared diverse viewpoints regarding the effects of decorations in the classroom. Some emphasized the inspiring element, pointing out that decorations boost creative pursuits and serve as inspiration for work. Others underlined the need for a vibrant atmosphere, proposing that even the most basic decorations should contain current and popular objects to foster a sense of religion and nationalism in the students.

*"Decorations in the classroom have an impact because sometimes we get inspiration for our tasks, how to improve, or how to enhance our creations..."\* - Informant 1*

*"We students need to see a lively environment, and even if it is minimal, there should still be popular and relevant items like posters about presidents, patriotic pledges, and prayers. These are strong elements, especially in instilling faith in the classroom..."\* - Informant 2*

*"It is somewhat intimidating to think that you are being watched, and it feels like you are not in control of yourself..."\* - Informant 3*

*"Display boards are well-done; you can get an idea about a specific topic. It depends on the student. For me, I prefer classrooms with minimal decorations..."\* - Informant 4*

*"The only purpose of decorations is to liven up the classroom, provide information that we already know,*

*or serve as a reminder for us to remember the limited knowledge we have acquired since beginning school..." - Informant 5*

*"My learning experience because it is engaging and provides motivation. Maybe it is better to have a minimal design so that the written materials do not overpower everything..." - Informant 6*

*"I do believe that having selected or constrained learning materials or decorations inside the classroom is a nice concept because why not employ that kind of arrangement if it is for the benefit of the students..." - Informant 7*

Decorations have an effect that goes beyond aesthetics. Students view decorations as sources of inspiration and elements of an interesting and inspiring learning environment. The range of responses highlights the subjective nature of people's perceptions of classroom decorations. It suggests that individual preferences and comfort levels with the classroom environments shape these perceptions. The idea that decorations serve as inspiration is consistent with Carlson's (2007) study on the effects of environmental aesthetics on learning motivation and engagement. The range of answers highlights how individualized people's opinions about classroom décor are. While some find inspiration and motivation in a visually stimulating environment, others may feel intimidated or prefer minimalism. In order to create a classroom that meets the numerous needs and comfort levels of students, it is imperative that educators strike a balance between the many preferences expressed by respondents and create an environment that strikes a balance between simplicity and visual appeal. Teachers need to be aware of the different preferences expressed by the participants and take care to create a space that strikes a balance between minimalism and visual attractiveness. By meeting the various requirements of the students and encouraging creativity without overcrowding the classroom, this method can improve the overall learning process. Adding well-selected and functional décor could make the "Inspiration Oasis" for students more interesting and inspiring.

### **Theory of Optimal Classroom Aesthetics (TOCA)**

A theory was developed that involves systematically coding and analyzing qualitative data, iteratively refining categories and relationships emerging from the data, ultimately resulting in a grounded and contextually rich theoretical framework. The developed theory is the Theory of Optimal Classroom Aesthetics (TOCA). TOCA posits that the visual appeal of a classroom, achieved through a delicate balance of aesthetics, purposeful decoration choices, and sensitivity to individual preferences, significantly influences the overall learning experience. Central to TOCA is the idea that an optimal learning environment involves not only the careful selection of visually pleasing elements but also the thoughtful integration of functional and inclusive design principles. The theory emphasizes that a visually engaging and inclusive classroom positively impacts student motivation, engagement, and well-being. TOCA guides educators in navigating the fine line between creating stimulating learning spaces and avoiding distractions, offering a framework that underscores the importance of

individualized preferences, adaptability, and a holistic approach to classroom aesthetics. It recognizes that optimal classroom aesthetics contribute not only to the physical environment but also to the socio-emotional and cognitive dimensions of the learning experience, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes.

### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Theory of Optimal Classroom Aesthetics (TOCA) is visually appealing in that an inclusive classroom has a positive effect on student motivation, engagement, and well-being. There is an intricate connection between classroom aesthetics and the learning experiences of elementary students. Achieving this balance in a visually appealing yet minimalist classroom offers a suitable learning setting that satisfies students' diverse needs. Students reported increased focus, participation, and a better learning experience in a minimalist classroom. This demonstrates that fewer decorations reduce distractions and create a calmer learning environment. Educators are encouraged to examine the visual aspects of their classroom regularly and make any necessary changes to maintain an extensive learning environment. Colorful and relevant posters, student work displays, and newsboards are among the significant visual components teachers can consider introducing into their classrooms. These aspects not only add visual interest but also act as reminders of the student's achievements and development. This would provide a complete understanding of how classroom decorations affect student learning. By applying these recommendations, educators and school administrators can establish learning environments that promote optimal student engagement, concentration, and learning outcomes. Educators can positively impact students' motivation and overall academic performance by creating a visually appealing and functional learning environment. TOCA is recommended as it provides educators with a solid foundation for optimizing classroom aesthetics. TOCA contributes to the construction of engaging and inclusive learning environments that promote student motivation, well-being, and educational outcomes by taking into account visual appeal, individual preferences, and inclusivity. Using TOCA principles in the classroom can assist instructors in properly designing their classrooms to facilitate optimal student engagement, concentration, and learning outcomes.

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