

WordCamp Asia 2023

# How can theme developers monetize in the era of Block Themes?

Hidekazu Ishikawa  
@kurudrive



# Who am I ? - Self introduction -

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## Hidekazu Ishikawa

 From Japan

 Theme developer / CEO



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**2012** First General-purpose theme published.

# Lightning

By [Hidekazu Ishikawa](#)



2015

The screenshot shows the Lightning theme homepage. At the top, there's a banner with a photo of a child wearing ski goggles and a snowboard. Below the banner, the title "Johnijirou On Snow" and subtitle "Growing up everyday" are displayed, with a "READ MORE" button. Three circular icons represent features: "For all purposes" (checkmark), "Powerful features" (gear), and "Surprisingly easy" (document). To the right, there's a search bar and a "Recent Posts" sidebar with links like "Launch of new product!!", "We welcomed a new team member!!", and "Marketing convention report!". A small preview of a post about a new product is shown at the bottom.

Theme Lightning published on [wordpress.org](https://wordpress.org)

Thanks to **80,000+** active installs  
Lightning is a very simple & easy to customize theme which is based on the Bootstrap. It is also very friendly with custom post types and custom taxonomies. When you add a new one, the breadcrumbs will be adjusted and posts will look beautifully without editing or adding a template files.

[Preview](#)

[Download](#)

Version: 15.2.4

Last updated: December 26, 2022

Active Installations: 80,000+

WordPress Version: 5.5 or higher

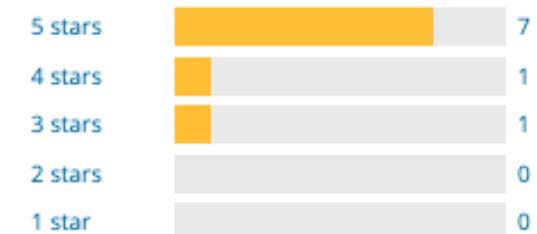
PHP Version: 5.6.0 or higher

[Theme Homepage →](#)

[See all >](#)

## Ratings

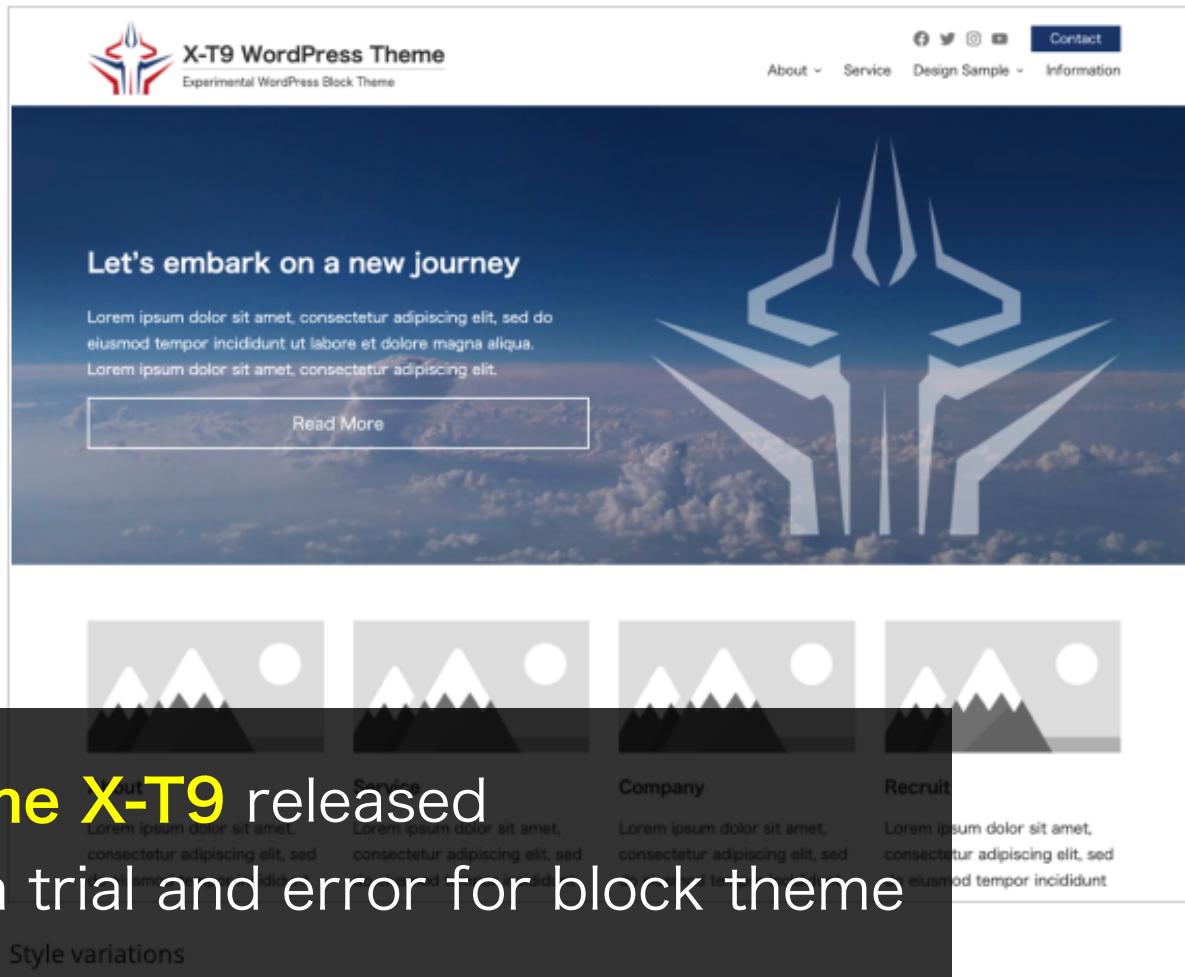
★★★★★ 4.5 out of 5 stars.



[Add my review](#)

# 2022

## X-T9 By Hidekazu Ishikawa



### Block theme X-T9 released

Currently in trial and error for block theme

In addition, development and sales of **theme extension plugin** and other plug-ins

[Preview](#)[Download](#)

Version: 1.3.4

Last updated: December 23, 2022

Active Installations: 200+

WordPress Version: 6.1 or higher

PHP Version: 7.2 or higher

[Theme Homepage →](#)

[See all >](#)

### Ratings

This theme has not been rated yet.

5 stars 0

4 stars 0

3 stars 0

2 stars 0

1 star 0

[Add my review](#)

# Business model of theme authors ( Before full site editing )

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Create and Sale

- ➥ Premium Themes
- ➥ Theme extension plugins
- ➥ Block extension plugins ... etc.

➥ Relatively possible to sell and make money.



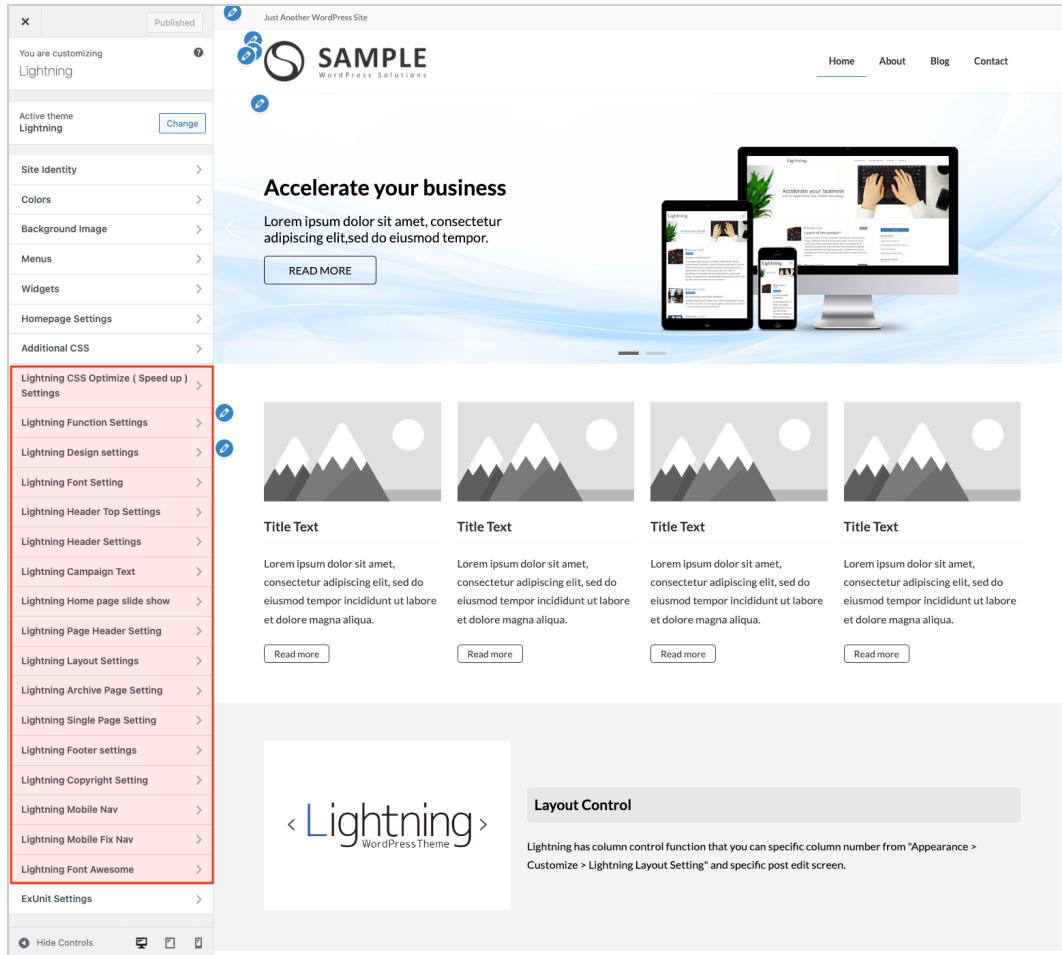
# Points where monetization has become more difficult

# 01

Traditional monetization points  
become less effective

# Before Full Site Editting

## Selling Premium theme



😊 User

↑ Easily edit      ↓ Reward 💰

😊 Theme authors

# Era of Full Site Editing

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The entire site can be customized with no code!

- ✍ Header and footer layout
- ✍ Specify color and font size
- ✍ Margin / Padding / Gap settings ...etc

I can do it !

→ **Much less theme dependent.**



**Then as someone who made a living out of  
theme sales...**

# Monetization points disappeared...

(` ;  $w$  ; `)

A matter of life and death

illilli —|—|○ illilli

# 02

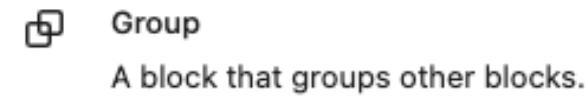
Decreased monetization effect  
by original Block features.

# Early stage block editors

- :( No margin adjustment function
- :( No border setting
- :( Can't Advanced layout  
( need like Media Block ) ... etc

We have developed our original blocks

→ **Added value** ( monetization points ).



## Color settings ^

### Text Color



[Custom color](#) [Clear](#)

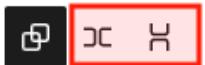
### Background Color



[Custom color](#) [Clear](#)

## Advanced ▾

 Group  
Gather blocks in a container.



#### Color

 Text

 Background

#### Typography

##### SIZE DEFAULT

S M L XL

#### Dimensions

##### PADDING

##### BLOCK SPACING

#### Border

#### RADIUS

# WordPress version upgrade...

- Advanced layouts are now possible with core blocks (Block Patterns).
- The similar function is added to the core block, etc.

# Monetization points disappeared...

(` ;  $w$  ; `)

## In addition ...

- Released original blocks become an ongoing maintenance burden
- We have to keep checking Gutenberg's development closely ( to avoid unnecessary development ).

# 03

**CSS output by WordPress  
becomes complicated**

- The influence of **CSS output by WordPress has increased**
- It is **difficult to deal with specification changes** such as block CSS
- Apart from CSS knowledge, it became **essential to understand WordPress's unique CSS method**

Probably many theme & custom block developers are facing this issue?

However, it is inevitable in the evolution of WordPress.

| T – T ) .oO ( I know. I love WordPress... )

The area that theme developers have focused on for monetization is greatly influenced by FSE.

It has become difficult to monetize traditional "theme sales".



# Future direction of theme-related business

# How add value and differentiate?



# Differentiation by block patterns

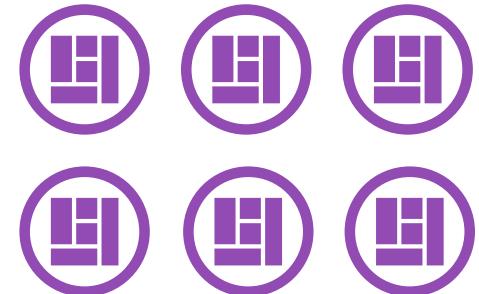
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## ☞ Easiest way

Includes various block patterns.

There is nothing that users cannot create on their own, so it is **weak as a point of monetization**.

Block Patterns



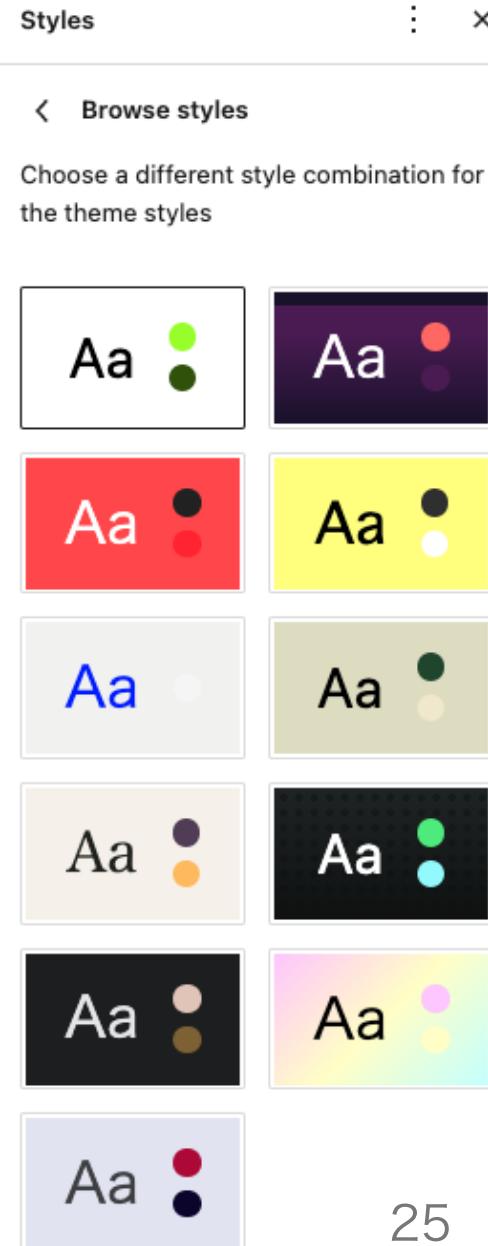
Theme

# Differentiation by Global Styles variations

## 💡 New Easiest way

"Global Styles variations" Feature Introduced in WordPress 6.0

We can create different variations within a single theme.



# Block Patterns / Global Style Variations

Even general users can make it, but...

High quality products created by professional designers  
→ High added value of course



**New extensibility** and **monetization points**.

# Our case

## Publish our own Block Pattern Directory

<https://patterns.vektor-inc.co.jp/>

 Only available in Japanese

Inspired by the Org site:

<https://wordpress.org/patterns/>



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Vektor Pattern Library. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Patterns, Usage Methods, My Account, and Log In. A banner at the top right provides information about the WordPress Block Patterns library, mentioning it's copyable and includes 157 patterns. Below the banner is a search interface with fields for 'Category' (set to '指定なし'), 'Pattern Type' (set to 'セクション'), 'Usage Product' (set to '指定なし'), and 'Keywords'. There are also dropdowns for 'Category' and 'Pattern Type' under the search form. Below the search area, there are several examples of block patterns, each with a preview image, a title, and details about its usage product, category, and pattern type. Examples include '目次プロダクト\_ビジネス全般\_カスタムCSS有', 'フォローCTA', '広告付き目次プロック', 'LINEからのお問合せ', 'ランチセットメニュー', and 'サービスの流れ横並\_ビジネス全般'.

# Why we created our own pattern directory?



# 1. Still difficult only with core blocks

Want to use our original blocks and CSS  
to provide higher quality patterns

! .org allowed **only core blocks** and **can't use Custom CSS**.

## 2. language problem

Characters look different in English and double-byte characters



# Pricing table

[Buttons](#) [Columns](#) [Featured](#)[Copy Pattern](#) Add to favorites

Even if it looks not bad in English but...

Default (960px) ▾

## Single

Enrich our growing community.

- General admission and member discounts for one adult

## Family

Support special exhibitions.

- General admission and member discounts for two adults

## Patron

Take support to the next level.

- General admission and member discounts for two adults

# 価格表

[Buttons](#) [Columns](#) [Featured](#)[Copy Pattern](#)

The balance is bad.

Default (960px) ▾

## 個人

成長するコミュニティをサポート。

- 大人1名の一般入場料と会員割引
- 特別展ごとに1枚の無料チケ

## ファミリー

特別展示を支援。

- 大人2名の一般入場料と会員割引
- 特別展ごとに4枚の

## 後援者

次のレベルの支援。

- 大人2名の一般入場料と会員割引
- 特別展ごとに5枚の無料チケ

### **3. Theme style affects**

Even if user paste the .org pattern,  
user need to make adjustments.

## 4. Monetization

We can't monetize only with the .org pattern directory...



Oo. (= w =)

# How we monetize?



**Through our pattern directory,  
Offer premium features to paying users**

Paid User Benefits are...



# 1. Premium patterns

- As the name suggests, the design and sample sentences are **more elaborate are ready to use.**
- Available to only paying users  
(need logged in)



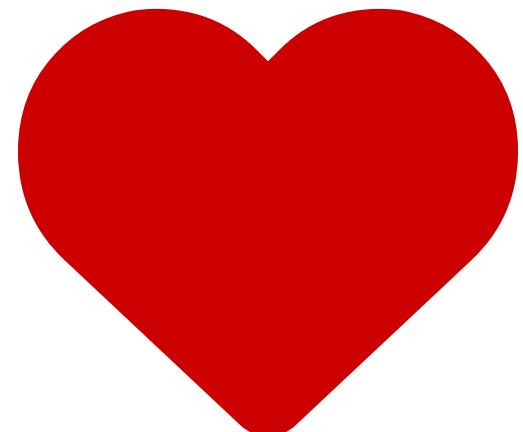
## 2. Favorite pattern registration function

Patterns are added one after another

→ **Hard to find**

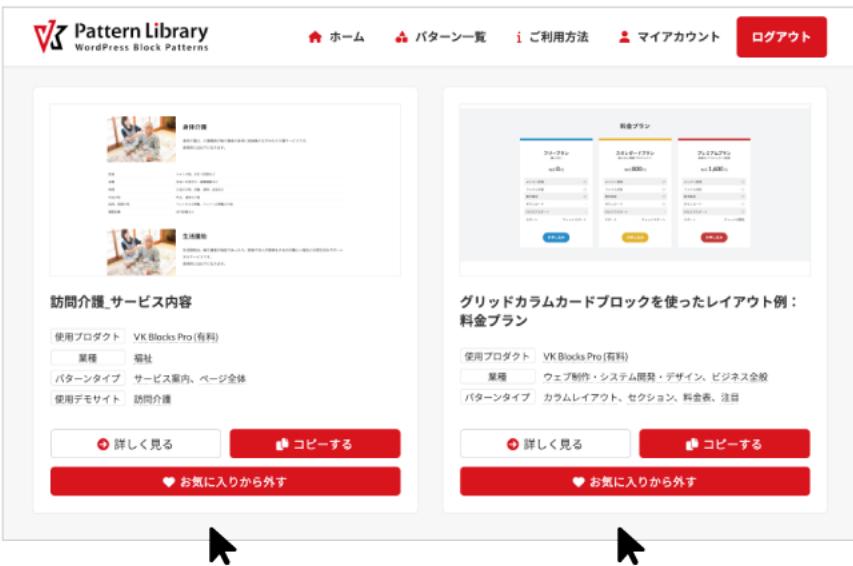
Function to register own favorite patterns

※ Same functionality as wordpress.org



# 3. Link function for favorite registered patterns

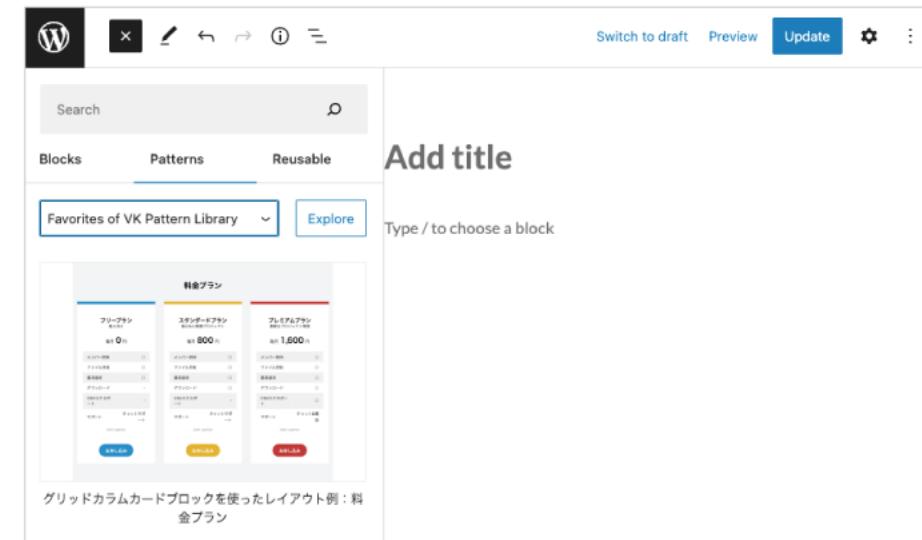
## Pattern library



Add to Favorites

API  
↔

## User's WordPress



Users can use it directly from the edit screen of their site

# What is a value-added pattern?

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Creating and developing more patterns has become very important for developers who were in the theme sales business.

Where is the added value that is the key to monetization?

# **With many beautiful patterns, is it easy to make a page?**

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We make and provide stylish and common patterns.

But Many non-profesional users...

- **Can't think about page structure** in the first step
- **Can't think of the sentences to write**



## **For the End-user ( Business owner )**

Just rewrite the text to suit their business.

## **Commissioned creation**

By using a pattern as a draft of the page,

the **meeting with the client becomes smooth**



# Localization is essential

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- Must be in the language of the country
- A design optimized for each language (characters/typefaces) is better
- Content and design trends vary by region (country)

## Localized versions

No competition with English-speaking developers.

# Is the theme business dead?

# Theme is important after all

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Themes and patterns are closely related to the global styles

Bring in a partial pattern from outside and use it  
→ There is a problem with the uniformity of the design.

Having said that "FSE reduces theme dependency",  
**the importance of the theme is high.**

# Users need good themes and highly practical patterns

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FSE is highly configurable and customizable but...

→ **Too much configuration work**

It's **quite cumbersome** to make from scratch

**Know how to use**



**Can create designs**

**Same for WordPress**

# Responsive design compatibility

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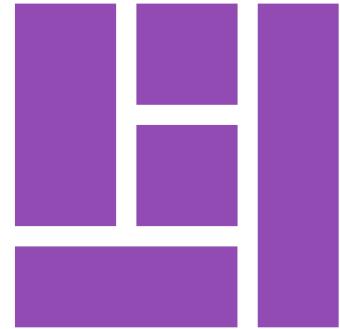
How to control display elements according to screen size?

- With a single screen width,  
it might be possible to lay out well somehow.
- **Layout on multiple widths are actually not that easy**

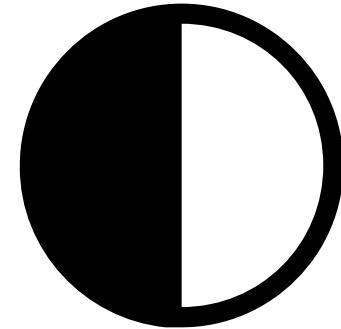
If a theme/pattern to match your purpose is available,  
you can have website faster by purchasing it.

It will be difficult to monetize the theme alone, but...

A set with a **Value-added pattern** and **Global styles** are there will be **many business opportunities**.



**Value-added  
Patterns**



**Global Style  
Variations**

# At the end

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What do you think about future theme business?

Please share your opinion

- Twitter #WCAsia @kurudrive
- Talk to me! ( with simple words and short sentence )

Thank you