

WordCamp Asia 2023

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

Hidekazu Ishikawa
@kurudrive



Who am I ? - Self introduction -

Hidekazu Ishikawa

 From Japan

 Theme developer / CEO



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

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

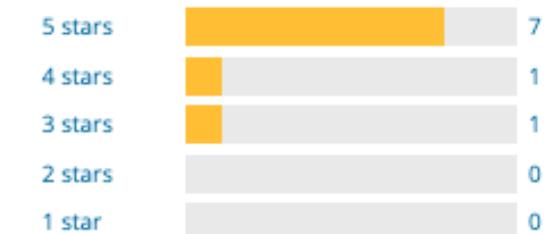
PHP Version: 5.6.0 or higher

[Theme Homepage →](#)

[See all >](#)

Ratings

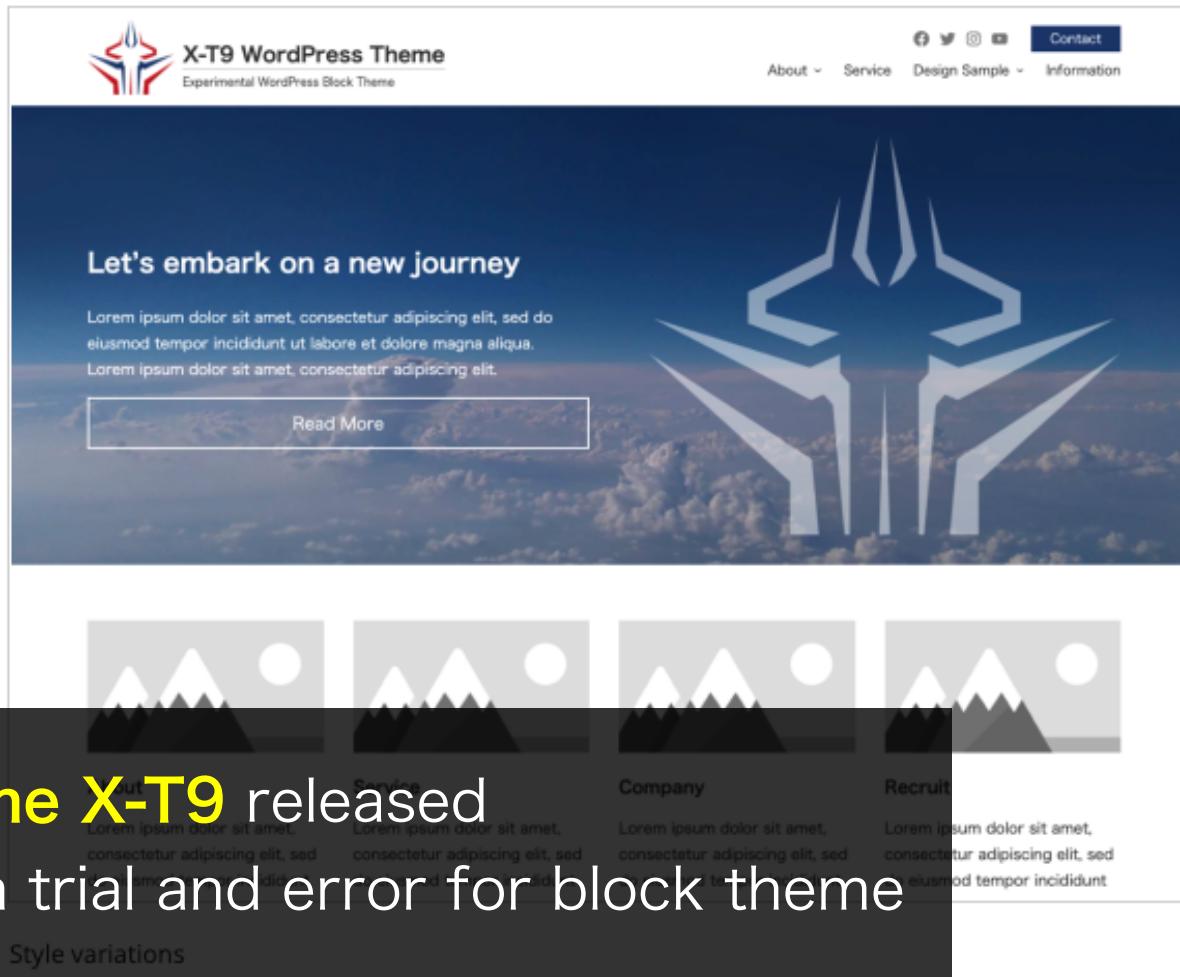
4.5 out of 5 stars.



[Add my review](#)

2022

X-T9 By Hidekazu Ishikawa



Block theme X-T9 released

Currently in trial and error for block theme

Style variations

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)

Create and Sale

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

➥ Relatively possible to sell and make money.



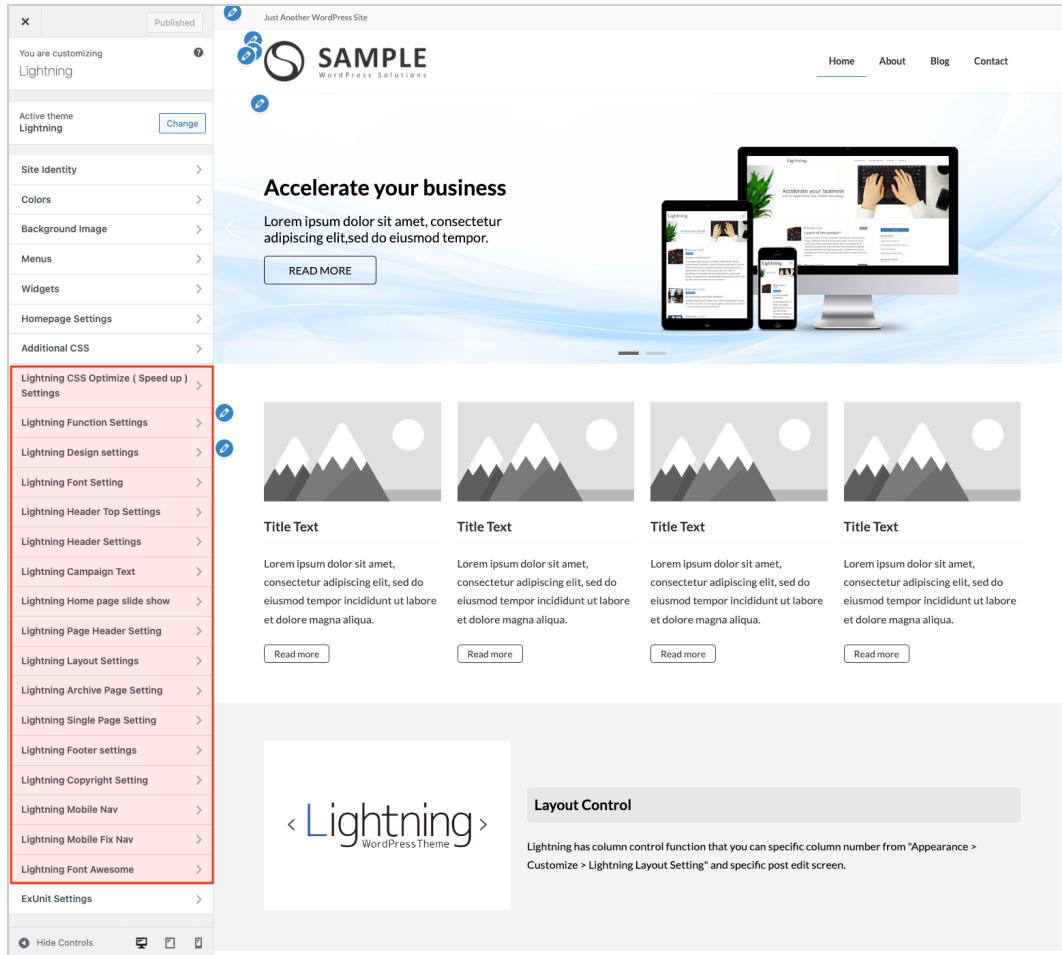
Points where monetization has become more difficult

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

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

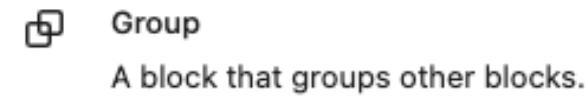
Decreased monetization effect
by original Block features.

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](#)

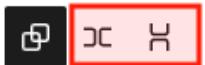
Background Color



[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

 PX

RADIUS

PX

Advanced

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?



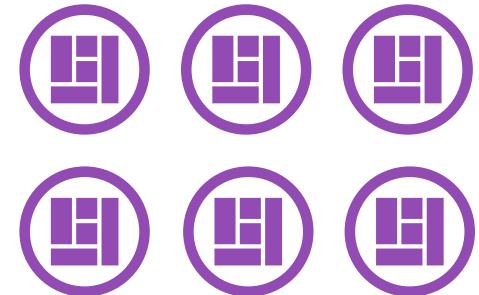
Differentiation by block patterns

☞ 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



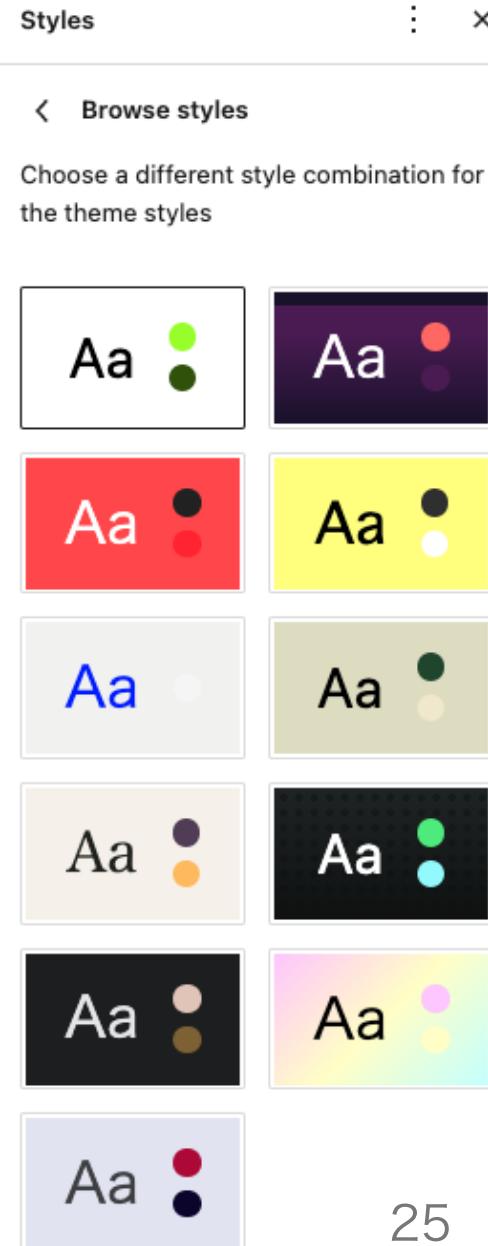
Theme

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

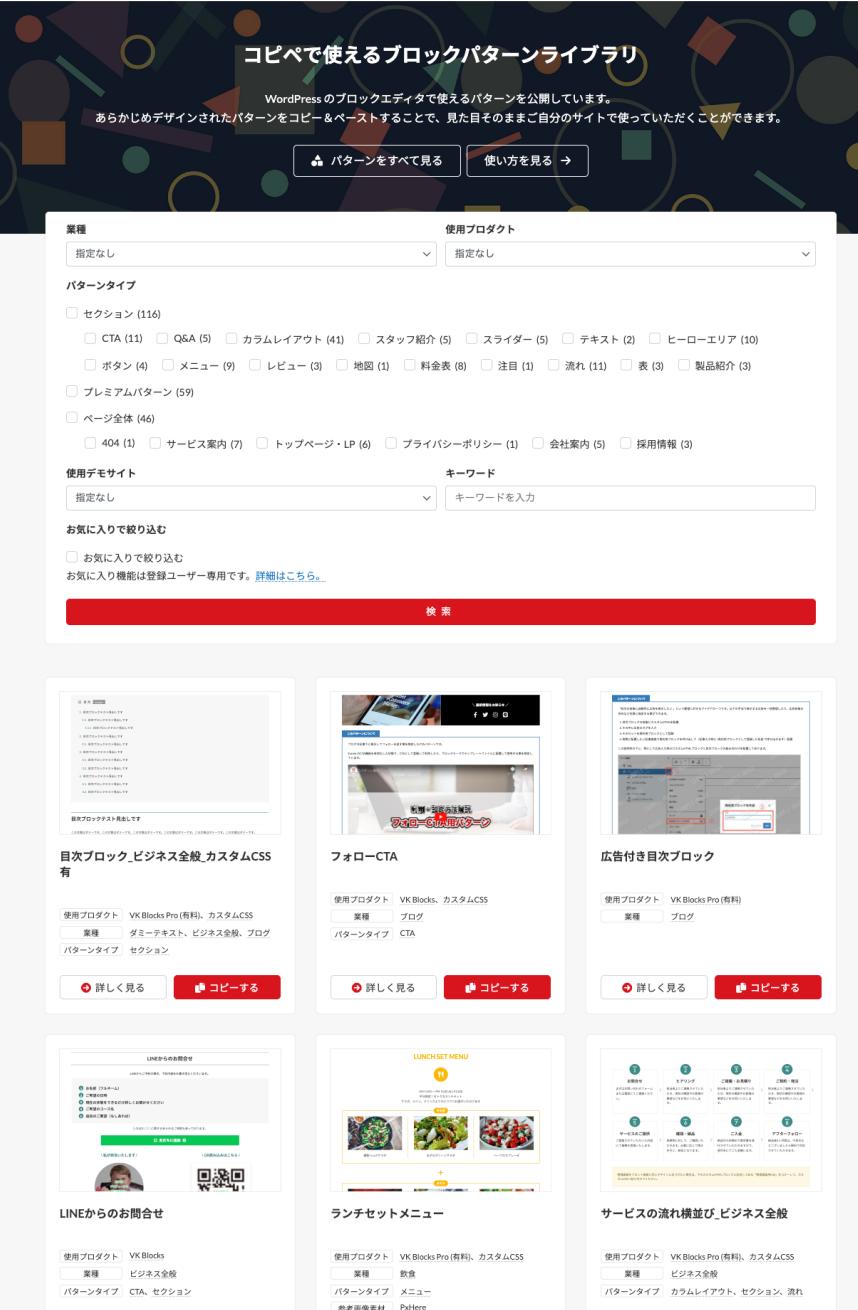
Publish our own Block Pattern Directory

<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. Below the banner, there's 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'. A large red search button is at the bottom of the search form. Below the search area, there are several examples of block patterns, each with a preview image, a title, and some descriptive text. 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

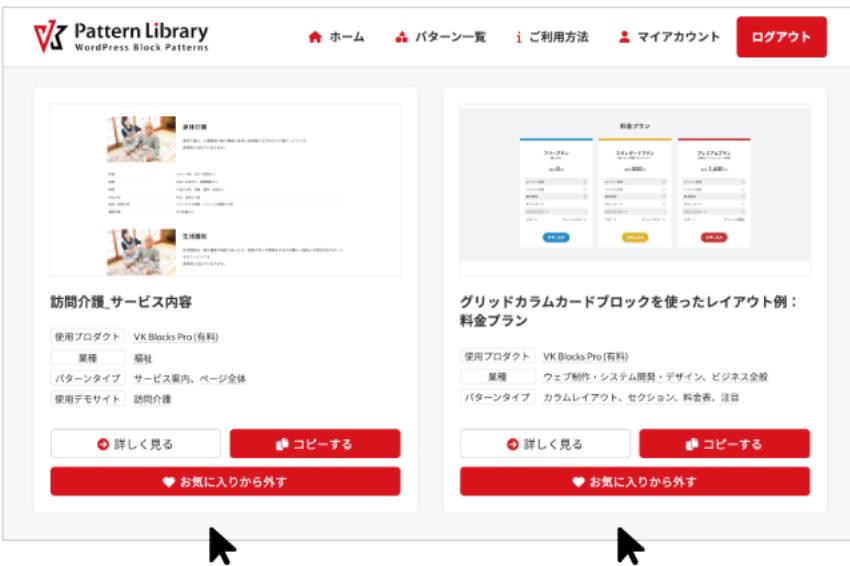
→ **Hard to find**

Function to register own favorite patterns

※ Same functionality as wordpress.org

3. Link function for favorite registered patterns

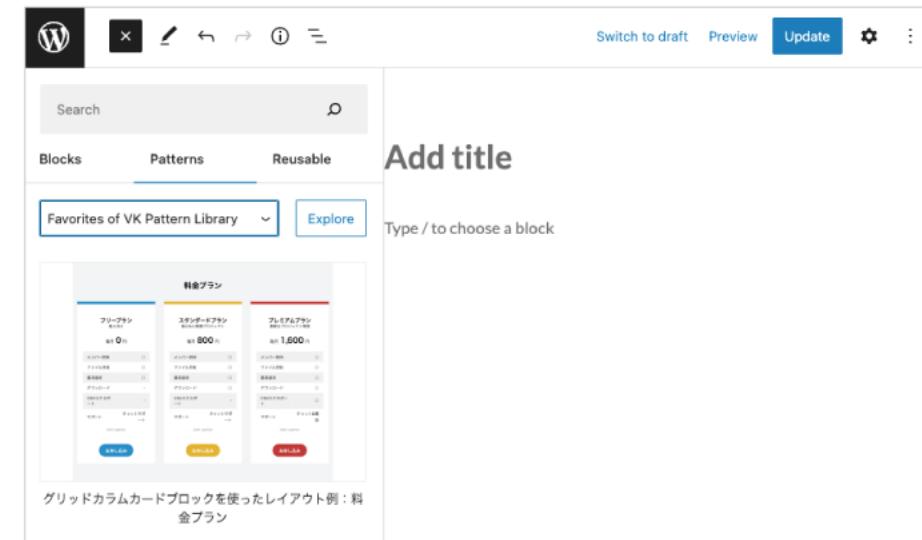
Pattern library



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?

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?

We make and provide stylish and common patterns. But...

- Many non-professional users can't think about page structure in the first step
- They 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

- 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

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

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

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

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

At the end

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