Book review

Online Gravity: The Digital Giants Driving the Way You Live, Earn and Learn

As the title of the book suggests, *Online Gravity: The Digital Giants Driving the Way you live, Earn and Learn* is about the digital world and how the way people operate is influenced by the leading companies within the digital world. The main title of the book ("Online Gravity") is a play on words since the book is not about physics. However, the use of the word "gravity" (which is a phenomenon whereby things that contains energy are brought together) signals that "online" is a "force" beyond our control. The title of the book is also connected with the name of the business that the book's author, Paul McCarthy, owns and operates (Online Gravity Consulting).

The structure of the 322-page book is a preface and introduction followed by three main sections. The preface introduces the reader to the concept of "online gravity", where the author explains why he thinks that the web operates with a certain "force" that results in certain outcomes. He also explains why he wrote the book and his personal background. The reader is then provided with an introduction that explains in more detail what online gravity is and gives a solid context to assist with reading through the book's three sections.

The three sections in the book are: "The Phenomenon", which has five chapters; "The Laws", which is by far the largest section and has seven chapters (each chapter is a "law"); and lastly, "The Future", which has four chapters.

The difficulty I had with reviewing this book is that I was reviewing it as an Academic for an academic audience; but it is not an academic book. Thus, the style of writing took me some time to accept. There are lots of short sentences and simple language; and at times it is a bit conversational. For example, phrases such as "lo and behold" are

unfamiliar words in reading, but common in conversation. There are also times when the writing is tangential and the reader can get a bit lost in some of the other side discussions, which also impacts negatively on the flow of the reading.

The book seems to have been written for a mass audience as a general enjoyment book. Business people would be a suitable target audience for the book. In fact, the book would probably also suit young readers such as teenagers who are passionately interested in the online world. As such, I would definitely recommend it to high school students who were interested in the topic. Not necessarily to be read in entirety, but some of it would definitely be suitable. The language is very simple and concepts are explained in great detail so that the concept could be grasped quite readily. However, as it is not an academic book, it is awkward reviewing such a book in an academic journal.

That is not to say that mainstream books cannot be used in academic arenas, however, I would not recommend this one to a university library. There were times that "Online Gravity" reminded me of another book I have read called *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* by David Meerman Scott. Both books essentially discuss the power of the internet and the web and how the way businesses operate in today's environment is necessarily different. For example, both books discuss aspects such as "the long tail"; searching online; and online companies. Whilst the books are similar to each other in a number of ways due to content, there are also plenty of differences and one of those certainly comes down to style.

"Online Gravity" is written in a much more conversational tone. It is at times not well structured and can take longer than it needs to, to make a point. By contrast, "The new rules of marketing & PR", whilst a longer book, is far more structured and has a logical flow. It also contains case studies that help to exemplify points and those case studies have their own heading to give them a separate but adequate discussion. Scott's book is not only

available through numerous university libraries but has also been used by some institutions as the set textbook for relevant subjects.

Whilst I would not recommend McCarthy's book would be a suitable textbook for a higher education subject, it does offer an interesting read. Some parts of the book were particularly enjoyable, whilst other sections were a bit too disjointed for me. For example, in the chapter "how does online gravity function?", there was a terrific section discussing how academic journals and citations work; discussing citations as "the stock and trade of academic credibility" and likened that to the way Google operates. This was a terrific analogy and was also presented in a light and engaging way. This lead beautifully to a section on "cumulative advantage" that would give a reader who does not understand search engines a wonderful insight into how they operate, and in a very basic simple manner.

There were many such examples in the book, and I confess that the more I read into the book, the more I enjoyed it. In part, this may have been because I became accustomed to the style of writing. However, I think one of the things that detracted from the early section is the author's efforts to constantly remind the reader how the online world was so much like the solar system. At times, the analogy became tiresome and was certainly unnecessary. For example, a number of sections about companies contained drawings of planets named after the companies to signify their relative size. After a

while, the point had been made and it became a bit redundant.

However, I also think that the second and third sections of the book were stronger than the first section. The middle section about the "laws" was much more structured and the final section on the future provided the reader with an insight into what may be to come as well as some very helpful tips for businesses. One such chapter is "strategies for small business owners and company executives". There are a range of tips on how to operate a business online in achievable ways based on simple techniques.

In summary, "Online Gravity" is a simply written book about a complicated topic. Some people in business have little knowledge of how the online world operates and seem almost fearful of it because it is unknown and that makes it uncomfortable for them. The book "Online Gravity" would be ideal for someone in business to read who lacked confidence and understanding in operating online. It would also be a great read for anyone who was simply interested in the area, and for high school students – particularly older teenagers who may be interested in business studies and marketing. As previously mentioned, the book is not an academic book. However, it may nonetheless be a pleasant bit of light reading for academics.

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