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The Formula: How Algorithms Solve All Our Problems...and Create More



Synopsis

A fascinating guided tour of the complex, fast-moving, and influential world of algorithms - what they are, why they're such powerful predictors of human behavior, and where they're headed next. Algorithms exert an extraordinary level of influence on our everyday lives - from dating websites and financial trading floors, through to online retailing and internet searches - Google's search algorithm is now a more closely guarded commercial secret than the recipe for Coca-Cola. Algorithms follow a series of instructions to solve a problem and will include a strategy to produce the best outcome possible from the options and permutations available. Used by scientists for many years and applied in a very specialized way, they are now increasingly employed to process the vast amounts of data being generated, in investment banks, in the movie industry where they are used to predict success or failure at the box office, and by social scientists and policy makers. What if everything in life could be reduced to a simple formula? What if numbers were able to tell us which partners we were best matched with - not just in terms of attractiveness, but for a long-term committed marriage? Or if they could say which films would be the biggest hits at the box office, and what changes could be made to those films to make them even more successful? Or even who is likely to commit certain crimes, and when? This may sound like the world of science fiction, but in fact it is just the tip of the iceberg in a world that is increasingly ruled by complex algorithms and neural networks. In *The Formula*, Luke Dormehl takes listeners inside the world of numbers, asking how we came to believe in the all-conquering power of algorithms; introducing the mathematicians, artificial intelligence experts and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs who are shaping this brave new world, and ultimately asking how we survive in an era where numbers can sometimes seem to create as many problems as they solve.

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Customer Reviews

I wasn't quite sure how to rate this book. I enjoyed it for sure, but I'm not convinced I'm in favor of it. Though the author claims to point out both the pluses and minuses of using data-mining and algorithms to form conclusions, he seems to come down on the plus column. It was through sheer luck that the book I read immediately before this was called "Standard Deviation". In this one, the author describes how you can set computers to finding patterns in any mass set of data. The more the data, the more ridiculous patterns one can find. He gives dozens and dozens of examples. The one everyone is familiar with is the one where the stock market goes up when an original NFL team wins the Super Bowl. There was one fallacious one where experts erroneously concluded that living near a power grid caused illnesses and deaths. The point I'm trying to make is that these two books seem to be at odds with each other. And I find Standard Deviation to be the more convincing case. Some of "The Formula" sounds so over-the-top to me. The patterns they think they find when trying to match people for marriage, the guys who look for patterns in their biological readings, this smacks of exactly what "Standard Deviation" talks about. So, one wonders why I gave the book four stars. Well, just because I disagree with a book doesn't mean I have to give it a bad rating. It was quite interesting to read all these new developments in using algorithms, formulae, and algorithms to ATTEMPT to do these cool things. At least the author DOES point out the dangers to society in doing this.

I was very curious about the topic. It is exciting to watch how we passed the manual work to machines, then calculations to computers and now we want to get rid of decision making burden transferring it to unbiased algorithms. I should say that The Formula has fully met my expectations and provided me with enough food for future thought. The book is nicely structured and full of references and interesting examples. I was surprised by the fact, how up to date is the information. Nowadays the one would expect to get all the news from the internet and not from the books (as it takes enormous amount of time work with the resources, and then actually write and publish the book), so the author did a great job here! The language is scientifically precise, but easy to read at the same time. I have enjoyed my reading and would recommend the book to the people who want to know more about the topic.

Are you a mathematician or AI expert who is interested in algorithms and technology? If you are, then this book is for you. Author Luke Dormehl, has written an outstanding book that discusses algorithms and their useful functions. The author begins by exploring the Quantified Self movement: An ever-expanding group of similar individuals who enthusiastically take part in a form of self-tracking, somatic surveillance. Next, he explains how two American economists (David Gale and Lloyd Shapley) in 1962, set out to devise an algorithmic solution known as "The Match." Then, the author discusses that how our body regulates temperature, breathing and heart rate, so too is the dream of autonomic computing for algorithms to self-manage, self-configure and self-optimize, without the need for physical or mental input on the part of users. In addition, he examines one of the highest-profile uses of algorithms to analyze text. Finally, the author proposes that users should learn more about the world of this book, since knowledge of the algorithmic processes is going to be key to many of the important debates going forward to predicting the future in everything from human relationships to law. This excellent book helped the author answer the following two questions: How do we stay human in the world of algorithms? Second: Is there one-size-fits-all answer to how to best deal with algorithms?

I went to buy "The Glass Cage" and this book was placed right next to it and I bought it as well. Perhaps an algorithm was used to place this book on the shelf. The book is well worth the read for a very specific reason; we all may understand the technology we use to greater and lesser extents and nearly all of us use it. This book will make you consider how the technology is being used by large players in society and its impact on us. Understanding how a computer or a cell phone works is one thing (technical), understanding how they are being used (deployed and their capacities) is quite another. This book goes a long way toward helping a person learn about and understand the latter.

My best friend is a Luddite. "People are getting more machine like, I swear." On the other hand, I'm a technophile, so we have some spirited discussions. "Laugh it off," I say. "They're just trying to sell you something, what do you care? Just don't give them any money!" So I start reading this book. After the first chapter I'm jazzed: This is some helpful, encouraging stuff! Midway through the book I'm starting to get a bit creeped out. By the end I'm about ready to switch over to her side. Whatever you might think about loss of privacy, the intrusiveness of large organizations, ... it's already worse than you think it is. Full disclosure: I'm a programmer. I'm one of the people responsible for the "Formula." When the first A-bomb test took place in New Mexico, many of the scientists responsible

had the feeling, "What have we unleashed on the Earth?" I'm not quite to that point yet concerning computer algorithms and big data and the like, but The Formula points in some scary directions.

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