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**A Book Review: Online Gravity: The Unseen Force Driving the Way you Live, Earn, and Learn \***

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Online Gravity is an insight into how the world has changed. Why? For example, when we have a moment of downtime we show the world we are on holiday in Istanbul via Facebook with photographs of the Blue Mosque hence ramping up our social status; we tell our colleagues what skills we have via LinkedIn or tweet an interesting article we have read in the Economist. This is a book about insights, telling you why the digital world has taken over the models of consumption, business and society. Why Facebook is a CIA agency as ‘everyone tells the world where we are, whom we are with and what we are doing’ thus rendering the end of James Bond and other spies. This is an explanation of why hotels are challenged by Airbnb as the shared economy matures but also why Pepsi is not in cyberspace. Fundamentally the book describes the driving forces or pull towards digitalisation as an online gravity force. The book clearly describes the changing world, provides distinctive and original insights in an accessible manner to the lay reader, sets out the universal laws of online gravity and gives direction for the future.

The book is split into three parts, section one is an overview of the driving forces towards Online Gravity, section two are seven universal laws of Online Gravity and section three represents the future. There are sixteen chapters in total. Section one is called the Phenomenon. At the centre of the book is the phenomenon of gravity in which the mass of objects naturally gravitate towards one point, that is the phenomenon of digital living in which everything migrates to the strongest mass. As Planet Earth is consumed and transformed by gravity, Planet Search (Google), Planet Sell (eBay), Planet Reference (Wikipedia), Planet Social Media (Facebook), Planet Customer-Relationship Management (Salesforce) and Planet Retail (Amazon) become more and more prominent. Online Gravity occurs due to three major drivers; the increasingly democratic and social nature of knowledge, the digitisation of that knowledge and the global connectivity of the web. These forces make knowledge accessible and empower the shared economy. Thus business, society and

consumers have the tools to capture, organise and share valuable information on a vast scale and at a very low cost. The returns on investment are thus greater in the online world. For example, an online world means Amazon can sell any book anywhere in the world whereas the British book store chain Waterstone is limited to physical locations. This is known as the Long tail effect (selling small amounts of many things). The web's fundamental design is the glue of the hyperlinks. Hyperlinks are the way of finding your way around. Exponential growth is due to timing, being first is not essential, third or fourth into the market place is good. Google wasn't first, it was WebCrawler, and incidentally where is Myspace today! Fundamentally, leveraging growth patterns is like a snowball effect, meaning the growth of new services and products and the future potential for fast growth will continue to accelerate and compound. Universities have played a fundamental part in this growth through establishing companies, products and knowledge. Google was founded by graduate students at Stanford University and the famous Google search technology - originally called BackRub – was funded by a US National Science Foundation Grant for a Digital Library Initiative. Apple's multi-touch technology, which made the iPhone what it is today, is based upon the research of Professor John Eli and his doctoral student Wayne Westerman at the University of Delaware.

Section two explains the seven laws of Online Gravity. The first of the seven laws of Online Gravity is that by its very nature it is a global force. In other words the web is not limited by geographical boundaries, it is both a local and global customer. Law two means Online Gravity loves big winners. Once upon a time Myspace was the dominating power in social media, however over recent years its popularity has dwindled as other contenders came to the market place. Facebook overtook Myspace in 2008 in terms of traffic and users, decimating Myspace's audience and its advertising derived revenue. Myspace was the leader when social media was in a development stage. Big winner means big losers. Facebook overtook and dominated. Big winners win because they are digital, connected in a network and increasingly global. Law three means Online Gravity applies to intangible goods. LP's and CD's used to dominate the music business, today its all-digital, online and downloadable directly to your smart phone. Law four of Online Gravity is that everything is accelerated. The world is getting richer, smarter and faster than ever before. This is largely due to technology. Acceleration means access to the arts, science and technology is very easy. At one time our parents may have had a set of encyclopaedias, today it is Wikipedia on the web. Law five, Online Gravity is revealed through data. Data is the stuff that makes the effects of

Online Gravity visible. Data means that a business knows that if you are shopping for fresh pasta then you are more likely to buy premium ice cream as well. Data means that complex algorithms can make predictions about your purchasing behaviours and as such for example recommend books when you visit Amazon.com. Law six means Online Gravity is networked not tribal. Many businesses in the traditional economy enjoy ongoing loyalty from customers, who may even have bought their products for generations. Online Gravity is different, it is less tribal and more networked. This is because many products in the online world have built-in benefits which relate to the network, customers may choose between online brands on taste and features initially, but once one of them reaches a planetary scale its pull becomes irresistible. Hence the demise of Myspace and the rise of Facebook, or AltaVista versus Google. Law seven means Online Gravity loves renaissance talent. In the fifteenth century Renaissance Europe, people with skills that spanned both the arts and science were commonplace. In a similar vein, talented people with a diverse range of skills are critical to the success of organisations looking to succeed in the age of Online Gravity. Sixteen percent of Apple's staff are from the liberal arts. Amazon has three times more economic graduates than the traditional multi-national corporation. Statistics is growing in significance and popularity with the major online enterprises. Students recognise this, and enrolments in statistics courses at universities are rocketing. The leaders of cutting technology companies are immigrants. Google's co-founder Sergey Brin was born in Russia. Facebook's Eduardo Saverin was born in Brazil. YouTube's Steven Chen is from Taiwan. Amazon's Jeff Bezos is the son of a Cuban immigrant (please take note Mr Trump!). So the above is the Renaissance effect.

The concluding section looks at the future, delving into work, money, business, society, superpowers and talent, answering questions about whether Online Gravity will bring us the sharing economy. Will Online Gravity create a more egalitarian society or one characterised by unfairness, segregation and unemployment. How can we and our children find work and prosper in the online era? In the future we can expect X-ray vision in the job market as employers will increasingly be able to find much more data about us than ever before (beware of your Facebook profile). Technology is replacing many jobs in the customer service industry through automation and self-service. Are the jobs of lorry or taxi drivers a thing of the past? Now you can get the best people working for you from anywhere in the world, recruitment is based upon expertise rather than geography. As the world becomes more and more connected by the day, it is becoming more integrated. Online Gravity

provides an open, collaborative and increasingly egalitarian global society. It also reduces consumption through the shared economy. Distance, geography and language are no longer barriers. Everything is open (or nearly). However, the gap between rich and poor widens as the rewards for the Online Gravity big winners outstrip overall economic growth, heightening wealth inequality. The final key to the future, is the influence of superpower, at both a personal and institutional level. Personal superpower comes mainly through interacting with web-enabled technology increasingly surrounding us. We will be typing less and swiping or using gestures more. Advances in the access to knowledge means we can self educate or become armchair experts in a wide range of topics.

Overall, this is an insightful, well documented and easy to read book by Paul X. McCarthy. It can be read in a day and you do not have to be an expert of technology to delve into it. It is just a good informative book, well worth the read.

\* McCarthy, Paul X. (2015). *Online Gravity: The Unseen Force Driving the Way you Live, Earn, and Learn*. London: Simon & Schuster Ltd. (336 pp.; ISBN-13: 978-1471140853 [pbk])