Bursts: The Hidden Pattern Behind Everything We Do

Synopsis

A revolutionary new theory showing how we can predict human behavior-from a radical genius and bestselling author Can we scientifically predict our future? Scientists and pseudo scientists have been pursuing this mystery for hundreds and perhaps thousands of years. But now, astonishing new research is revealing patterns in human behavior previously thought to be purely random. Precise, orderly, predictable patterns... Albert Laszlo Barabasi, already the world's preeminent researcher on the science of networks, describes his work on this profound mystery in Bursts, a stunningly original investigation into human nature. His approach relies on the digital reality of our world, from mobile phones to the Internet and email, because it has turned society into a huge research laboratory. All those electronic trails of time stamped texts, voicemails, and internet searches add up to a previously unavailable massive data set of statistics that track our movements, our decisions, our lives. Analysis of these trails is offering deep insights into the rhythm of how we do everything. His finding? We work and fight and play in short flourishes of activity followed by next to nothing. The pattern isn't random, it's "bursty." Randomness does not rule our lives in the way scientists have assumed up until now. Illustrating this revolutionary science, Barabasi artfully weaves together the story of a 16th century burst of human activity-a bloody medieval crusade launched in his homeland, Transylvania-with the modern tale of a contemporary artist hunted by the FBI through our post 9/11 surveillance society. These narratives illustrate how predicting human behavior has long been the obsession, sometimes the duty, of those in power. BarabÃ¡si's astonishingly wide range of examples from seemingly unrelated areas include how dollar bills move around the U.S., the pattern everyone follows in writing email, the spread of epidemics, and even the flight patterns of albatross. In all these phenomena a virtually identical, mathematically described bursty pattern emerges. Bursts reveals what this amazing new research is showing us about where individual spontaneity ends and predictability in human behavior begins. The way you think about your own potential to do something truly extraordinary will never be the same. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition
Listening Length: 9 hoursÂ andÂ 50 minutes
Program Type: Audiobook
Version: Unabridged
Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: May 7, 2010

Language: English

ASIN: B003L8L4U8

Best Sellers Rank: #98 inÂ Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science > Mathematics #261 inÂ Books > Science & Math > Physics > System Theory #2242 inÂ Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Social Psychology & Interactions

Customer Reviews

I thought Albert-LÃ¡szlÃ BarabÃ¡si's first book, "Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means," was excellent (see my 4/18/10 review), so I looked forward to reading "Bursts" with great anticipation, hoping that he was going update us on all the interesting things he learned in the intervening 8 years (especially related to biomedicine and cancer). Instead, having just finished "Bursts," it's hard to convey how disappointed I am.While "Linked" presented plenty of solid and useful science in an appealing format, "Bursts" has minimal scientific content and I learned almost nothing. The only significant idea BarabÃ¡si presents is that the time-spacing of many events in the natural and artifical worlds follows a power law distribution, which means that events have some tendency to cluster into "bursts," although very widely spaced events can also occur, since power laws have "long tails" rather than dropping off exponentially (as BarabÃ¡si himself acknowledges in passing, "bursts" is a somewhat misleading term, since power law distributions are continuous, not dichotomous). But BarabÃ¡si doesn't offer much explanation for the ubiquity of these power laws, nor does he offer useful insights regarding their implications.He does try to argue that awareness of these power laws will eventually enable precise prediction of human behavior, but this is simultaneously both obvious and wrong (and it's telling that BarabÃ¡si appears to be unaware of the seminal work of Quetelet on this topic). It's obvious because we already know that people are necessarily creatures of routine and habit, so where we are and what we're doing will often be predictable. But it's wrong because, like the weather, our lives also involve volatility and bifurcation points, such that much that's important about our individual and collective lives will remain unpredictable. I've experienced this in my own life in profound ways, and so have you (think back, and you'll recall some pivotal moments).Most of the book is actually taken up by a discussion of an episode from Hungarian history of the 1500s. This may interest BarabÃ¡si for personal reasons, and perhaps it satisfies some urge to be a historian or novelist (which he apparently has a knack for), but it has no place in this book. I kept waiting for this plot and other plots interwoven throughout the book to all gel together in the end, but they never did -- I feel like I was waiting for Godot.Overall,

this book was a waste of money and (more importantly) time. The only redeeming feature is that I was able to read it quickly (three days), but that’s small consolation. I really don’t know what BarabÃ¡si was thinking. I must also add that I was partly swayed to read this book by the endorsement from Nassim Nicholas Taleb on the back cover; that endorsement has unfortunately harmed Taleb’s credibility in my eyes.

I find my own experience with this book well described by other reviewers in the 2-star rating. The only concepts I learned here were that prioritized queues can give power law distributions of waiting times, and that Levy flights can produce non-recurrent random walks even in 2 dimensions. That’s not a lot, and I could have found such concepts in scholarly publications for free. But you never know how you are going to stumble across a useful new idea, so maybe for this alone the price of the book was worth it.I enjoyed the Hungarian history, but the constant interruptions "for a message from our sponsor" (i.e. Barabasi) made it less like D.W. Griffith’s Intolerance (with multiple parallel plots) and more like a TV show where they build suspense only to cut to the commercials every three minutes. The only way I finished this book was to jump through it to read the Hungarian history thread uninterrupted, and then go back and pick up the science.There were a lot of off the wall characters paraded through the book, so it had interest as a shop of curios.But I would have to say that whatever actual assertions Barabasi is making about "the hidden pattern behind everything we do", I am not persuaded.

As a physicist in a slightly related field, this book was magic! It does a great job of catering to different backgrounds of readers, great solid examples. I also enjoyed the interspersing with historical events, like a case study. It reminded me of an Umberto Eco novel.Some topics may be more appreciated by an experienced reader such as Levy flights, but the author does a great job of reviewing ideas on Levy flights and explaining in the context.

Spends a lot of time regurgitating the history of early Hungary and Transylvania (his homeland) for reasons that never do become particularly clear. After his book, "Linked In" I was expect the same style and tone it was disappointed. I kept reading thinking that at some point Barabasi would tie it all together, but if he did that, I certainly missed it. Ended up not really be sure why he wrote the book. Some of the claims he made in the beginning certainly don’t come to fruition. A disappointment.

Barabasi is clearly a great thinker on this topic, but seems to know more than he shares in this

book. The patterns of our behaviour seem completely predictable, but the book is a bit hard to follow sometimes and lacks concrete examples to support its case. That's not a big problem, because it is still great fun to read and discusses some major problems of today.

Having read and enjoyed Linked very much, I was eager to get my hands on this book. The book was easy to read and maintained a level of tension throughout, as you might expect from an action series type of fiction. While Linked piqued one's interest in Power Laws and Networks and gave us ample leads to pursue these, Bursts tended to stop you from taking the leads! The Hungarian folklore did not do much for me other than that it was a good story. As I read the book I got the feeling that the author was setting up theories only to be proven wrong. From the point of view of a scientific pursuit, it is acceptable to define, test, validate, retest, and invalidate (under new evidence) new theories. Of course, at the end of the book I was left wondering if any of the theories are valid. Do we have Power Law, Einsteinian Random events, Poisson distributions, Levy plots, bursts, or what? If the author's intent was to make the reader ponder these then he achieved his goal.By the way, though the review says it is a Kindle book review, it is a paper book review.

I love Linked and I gave it a 5 star, but I can't keep reading this book. It is way too detailed on aspects that sometimes seem secondary to the main topic.

Power of Manifestation Hidden Wings (Hidden Wings Series Book One) Hidden Wings Box Set - Books 1-4 with BONUS Novella: Hidden Wings Series Collection Hidden Human Computers: The Black Women of NASA (Hidden Heroes) Hidden Pacific Northwest: Including Oregon, Washington, Vancouver, Victoria, and Coastal British Columbia (Hidden Travel) Hidden British Columbia: Including Vancouver, Victoria, and Whistler (Hidden Travel) THE HIDDEN PLACES OF YORKSHIRE: Includes the Dales, Moors and Coast (The Hidden Places Series) Hidden Tahiti (Hidden Tahiti, 2nd ed)