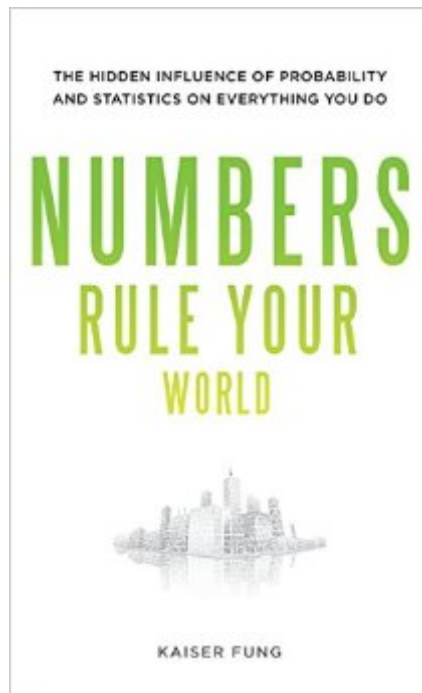


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# Numbers Rule Your World: The Hidden Influence Of Probabilities And Statistics On Everything You Do



## Synopsis

WHAT ARE THE ODDS YOU'LL WIN THE LOTTERY? How long will your kids wait in line at Disney World? Who decides that "standardized tests" are fair? Why do highway engineers build slow-moving ramps? What does it mean, statistically, to be an "Average Joe"? NUMBERS RULE YOUR WORLD In the popular tradition of eye-opening bestsellers like *Freakonomics*, *The Tipping Point*, and *Super Crunchers*, this fascinating book from renowned statistician and blogger Kaiser Fung takes you inside the hidden world of facts and figures that affect you every day, in every way. These are the statistics that rule your life, your job, your commute, your vacation, your food, your health, your money, and your success. This is how engineers calculate your quality of living, how corporations determine your needs, and how politicians estimate your opinions. These are the numbers you never think about—even though they play a crucial role in every single aspect of your life. What you learn may surprise you, amuse you, or even enrage you. But there's one thing you won't be able to deny: *Numbers Rule Your World* | "An easy read with a big benefit." •Fareed Zakaria, CNN "For those who have anxiety about how organization data-mining is impacting their world, Kaiser Fung pulls back the curtain to reveal the good and the bad of predictive analytics." •Ian Ayres, Yale professor and author of *Super Crunchers: Why Thinking By Numbers is the New Way to Be Smart* "A book that engages us with stories that a journalist would write, the compelling stories behind the stories as illuminated by the numbers, and the dynamics that the numbers reveal." •John Sall, Executive Vice President, SAS Institute "Little did I suspect, when I picked up Kaiser Fung's book, that I would become so entranced by it - an illuminating and accessible exploration of the power of statistical analysis for those of us who have no prior training in a field that he explores so ably." •Peter Clarke, author of *Keynes: The Rise, Fall, and Return of the 20th Century's Most Influential Economist* "A tremendous book. . . . If you want to understand how to use statistics, how to think with numbers and yet to do this without getting lost in equations, if you've been looking for the book to unlock the door to logical thinking about problems, well, you will be pleased to know that you are holding that book in your hands." •Daniel Finkelstein, Executive Editor, *The Times of London* "I thoroughly enjoyed this accessible book and enthusiastically recommend it to anyone looking to understand and appreciate the role of statistics and data analysis in solving problems and in creating a better world." •Michael Sherman, Texas A&M University, American Statistician

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book shows how statistical thinking works and how it's benefiting our lives. It's an easy-read book without a lot of jargon or, surprisingly, numbers. I found the book to be engaging - through the use of stories - and helpful in understanding something that otherwise could be quite dull. "Statistical thinking is distinct from everyday thinking. It is a skill that is learned. ... many applied scientists routinely use statistical thinking on the job," the author says. Statistical thinking is also often counter-intuitive. And this was my biggest take-away from this interesting book. Using the premise that we can learn statistical thinking and that we can apply it in everyday situations, Fung provides 10 stories to teach 5 big principles of statistical thinking: 1. Variability over Averages: Statistical average isn't the key, deviation from the average is. 2. Correlation over Cause and Effect: Cause and effect might provide rational explanation, but unexplained correlation is also useful and quicker to find. 3. Group differences over Group averages: Differences within groups are hidden by averaging groups together. 4. Errors are both positive and negative: Minimizing mistakes creates mistakes of a different kind. 5. The Impossible really is Impossible: Don't believe what is too rare to be true. The stories are applications of these principles in things we're all interested in. Like, the shortest waiting time at Disneyland, finding the source of a deadly E. coli outbreak, financial credit scores, highway traffic meters, steroid testing in Major League Baseball, SAT test writers, lie-detector tests, uncovering a lottery scam, and the safety record of airlines.

It is hard not to make the comparison between "Numbers Rule Your World" and "Freakonomics". Even the book has made a reference once. Ten real life case studies are used, paired up in five

chapters, to illustrate how different aspects of statistics affect our lives. Blogger statistician Kaiser Fung has made the topic surprisingly accessible, narrated in an engaging manner. Each chapter, the author picks two contrasting statistically related topics, juxtaposes them by taking turn to have the story told, and arrives at a conclusion. The narration is honest, impartially inquired from different angles. One of the author's objectives - besides convincing us that like it or not, numbers play a major role in our world today - I believe, is to expand our mind and horizon when interpreting certain situations as numbers are presented. And to appreciate what goes on behind the scene in your everyday life. To impart the various aspects of statistical thinking upon his readers, the author uses the case studies of highway engineers versus Disney 'Imagineers', epidemiologists versus credit modelers, insurers versus test developer (education), anti-doping agencies (sport) versus polygraph (lie detector), and the chances of jet crashes versus jackpots. Each case study - unlike Freakonomics - is backed up sufficiently by figures and facts. At times, I have to slow down my reading and think through the numbers, which I do greatly appreciate. In practical term, how would reading "Numbers Rule Your World" help your work and life? For one, when you take in the news around you, you may wish to see things in a different perspective. Should you take in the reported figures on the papers as they are? Why are things or processes made that way? Some see an imminent risk, others do not.

This book is fairly well written and it presents stories about current events in which statistics play a major role. I purchased it, however, hoping to learn some statistics. I have read other math books about different concepts ranging from calculus to math history that were both entertaining and informative from a mathematical point of view (Derbyshire, Dunham, etc.). I have found this book to very lacking in this regard. Statistics is my weakest area in math since I have never taken a course on the subject. What a student will learn in a first year statistics course, however, dwarfs what you will learn from this book. For instance, in the chapter regarding correlation versus causation, the author uses stories to highlight their differences, and explores how they are often mixed up. Having already known about this distinction, however, I picked up nothing mathematically from the chapter. Though there was no real insight into how these statistics are created. If you know absolutely nothing about statistics, you can pick up a little from this book. For instance, in the same chapter mentioned above, the author examines how statisticians determined spinach to be the cause of the e coli outbreak from a couple of years back. It's very simple. 20% of people reported eating spinach on a regular basis, but 80% of people reported eating spinach who had been diagnosed with e coli. The chances of that happening are very slim, statistically speaking. The author does not present in

any detail how this percentage is generated. The book does shine in its reporting about current events, and that is its strongest point. It's also particularly striking how few numbers it actually uses. Apparently, this is a part of its success since so few people are actually numerate.

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