

Amazon Data Details

(The notes provided here are intended to complement and provide supporting information for:

“Thriving at Amazon:
How Schumpeter Lives in Books Today”)

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Since not much is known about the characteristics of the books that are included, we attempted to gauge the current breadth of inclusion. On April 23, 2004 we downloaded the *New York Times* nonfiction hardcover and paperback best-seller lists that were to be published in the *Times* on April 25, 2004. Of the 35 books listed under “hardcover” only one could be used with the “Search Inside the Book” feature. Of the 35 books listed under “paperback” 13 could be used with the “Search Inside the Book” feature. Not much information is yet available from Amazon itself on the “Search Inside the Book” feature. For reasons not entirely clear, Amazon’s policy has been not to allow publishers to submit books electronically, instead requiring that publishers submit a physical copy of the book, that is then scanned in by Amazon.

(“Frequently Asked Questions About Search Inside the Book”):

How do I submit books electronically?

Currently, we only accept physical copies of approved Search Inside the Book titles.

Once I submit my books, how long will it take until they appear on the Web site?

We try to add all new books to the Search Inside the Book program as quickly as possible. Typically, it takes three to five weeks from when we receive a book until it appears on Amazon.com.

The policy of not accepting electronic submission of books is puzzling because it would seem to gratuitously increase, though only slightly, the cost to the publisher to

participate in the program. What is even more puzzling is that it also would seem to increase Amazon's costs to process the book, and to delay the book's appearance with the "Search Inside the Book" feature. In the long-run, the continued growth (and existence) of the feature would depend either on its increasing sales of the books, or on Amazon being able to charge for the feature's use, and pass some of the revenue on to publishers and authors. Apparently based on preliminary evidence, Amazon has claimed that, *ceteris paribus*, books with the "Search Inside the Book" feature sell 9% more copies than books that lack the feature (Parsons 2004).

Although the "customers who bought this book also bought" feature has been used to compile evidence that politically the United States is polarized into two distinct groups (see: Eakin 2004).

Amazon permits the "results" from a search to be ordered in a variety of ways, which as of May 12, 2004 consisted of: Featured Items; Bestselling; Avg. Customer Review; Price: Low to High; Price: High to Low; Publication Date; Alphabetical: A-Z; and Alphabetical: Z-A. Given limited time, we wanted to examine books that by some measure were either influential or of high quality, so we rejected the alphabetical ordering.

When Amazon accidentally released the identity of anonymous readers submitting book rankings, it was revealed that many authors were ranking their own books (see: CNN.com, 2004). This naturally reduces the credibility of the "Avg. Reader Review" ordering. In addition there are often only a few or even zero readers who have ranked a given book. So we also rejected the "Avg. Reader Review"

ordering.

We sought to learn from Amazon, what the ranking procedure was for the “Featured Items” ranking. But after a frustrating exchange of email, the Amazon customer service representative finally admitted that they would not share any information on this for competitive reasons. On February 29, 2004 I sent my third email to Amazon customer service:

I still would like to know the criteria that Amazon uses when they order books according to a "Featured items" ordering? The "Featured items" list is much different than, say, the "Bestsellers" list. So isn't it possible for you to explain how you come up with it?

On March 1, 2004 “Erik T.” of Amazon customer service emailed me the following reply:

Unfortunately we cannot provide you with the information you are requesting.

Due to the competitive nature of our business, our policy is not to give out information on the inner workings of our company.

So we settled upon the “bestselling” ranking. We do not put a high degree of confidence in this ranking either, since we were unable to learn much about it. We would have liked to have known how often it is updated, whether it includes all editions of a book, and the like. From our limited experience, we conclude that the “bestselling” ranking can change quite substantially over a period of as short as 10 weeks. (We suspect that the variability is greater than for other bestseller lists, such as the *New York Times*, but we have not checked this.)

For comparison purposes, on May 3, 2007, I also did a search for “Keynes”

among the Amazon “books” category. The search returned 29,124 “results.” This large number is an intriguing result that raises many questions. To what extent is Keynes referenced because his ideas still have resonance and usefulness? To what extent is he referenced because of his historical role as an advisor to governments? To what extent is he referenced because of his role as a member of the artistic/literary/cultural “Bloomsbury Group”? These questions would be interesting, but time-consuming, to answer, and must be left for another time (or another researcher). But in any event, the main purpose here is not to compare Schumpeter to Keynes, but to provide evidence of the lasting relevance and usefulness of at least one of Schumpeter’s ideas, creative destruction.

The Excel spreadsheet lists the 1,176 books whose content has been evaluated. Rank1 indicates the rank as of March 2, 2004 on the Amazon “Bestsellers” ordering of books with “Search Inside the Book” that referenced Schumpeter. On March 2, 2004 we recorded the top 100 such books. If a book appears in spreadsheet with no entry under Rank1, that means either that the book did not have the “Search Inside the Book” feature on March 2, 2004, or else that it was ranked lower than the top 100 on March 2, 2004. Rank2 indicates the rank as of April 30, 2004, on the Amazon “Bestsellers” ordering of books with “Search Inside the Book” that referenced Schumpeter.

Generally, any book was included in the spreadsheet, if it either was among the 100 top-ranked books on March 2, 2004, or was among the 200 top-ranked books on April 30, 2004. Rank3 is from a June 10, 2004 ranking and Rank4 is from a February 18, 2005 ranking. These rankings were also based on the “Bestsellers” ordering. Many books show up in more than one ranking, and limited time did not permit the content

analysis of all of the book titles collected in Rank3 and Rank4. (The spreadsheet posted on www.artdiamond.com only contains the books for which content analysis was done.)

Several books that originally appeared in the Amazon searches, were not included in the spreadsheet, for one of the following reasons: they referred to some other

Schumpeter besides Joseph; they included Schumpeter in the bibliography without mentioning him in the text; Amazon consistently displayed a “PAGES

UNAVAILABLE - TRY LATER” error message during attempts to view the pages that referenced Schumpeter; or there were no references to be found anywhere in the text.

Bibliography

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