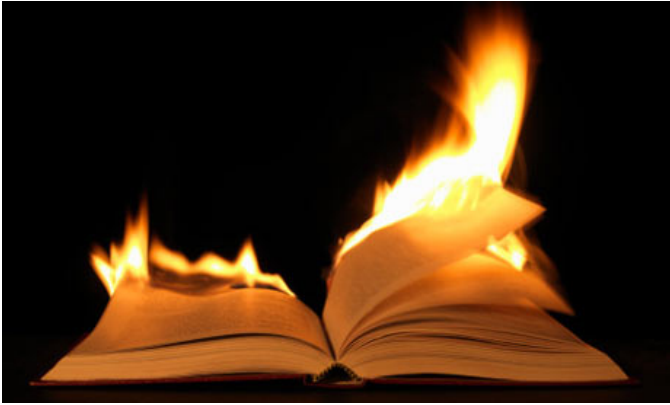


Digital books; could they make censorship and "book burning" easier?

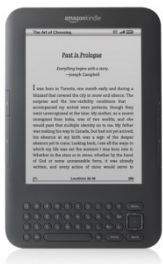


by [Lucia Ruggiero](#)

?Civil libertarians and consumer advocates call it "digital book-burning": censoring, erasing, altering or restricting access to books in electronic formats. Although we haven't yet seen the ebook equivalent of government-orchestrated bonfires or private citizens putting "obscene" books to the torch, there is a worrisome trend as we've moved to the cloud.? ([Jonathan Zittrain, wired.co.uk, 8 July 2013](#)).



Experts warn that the digital publishing of books may make it easier for these books to be censored, and or disappear, as they do not belong to the public. When e-book buyers bought copies of Orwell's '1984' on Kindle from Amazon in 2009, the book was still under copyright protection and so Amazon were able to delete it from every Kindle user who had previously bought and downloaded it digital format.



The unlimited control over digital books, that e-book distributors have, may in the future become a method of controlling readership, as demonstrated by Amazon's ability to delete the book from users' Kindles at the click of a button.

Digital formats for the arts and culture, such as books, paintings, sculptures and architecture, have been deemed to help in the preservation of the arts, as a digital book's pages will not fall out with time, or a digital, high resolution version of a painting won't fade, (the [Google Arts Project](#) is just one new online database which has followed on from this idea). However, could digitalized formats possibly have the opposite effect? If production of physical formats is reduced, due to the increasing use of digital formatting, erasing a book digitally could reduce the books' circulation, or even, in extreme cases, mean its extinction. Retraction of digital books is so easy, that claims of copyright violation or plagiarism can have a digital book virtually ripped out of the hands of e-book buyers. The control on the retraction of digital books, that distributors maintain, highlights a clear necessity for new laws that protect the rights of readers.

(Photos: [www.amazon.com](#) and [Tony Hutchings/ Getty Images](#))