

Les Luddites

France's culture minister has criticized Amazon for undercutting rivals and being a "destroyer of bookshops". Curiously, Aurelie Filippetti went on to claim that "Everyone has had enough of Amazon" although if French subjects weren't such active customers Mme Filippetti would have to concern herself with less weighty matters.

No doubt online sales have greatly challenged traditional, brick and mortar sellers of books and music. This debate is at least a decade old. Obviously consumers prefer the far wider choice that a virtual inventory can offer compared with a physical one. Many more titles are available, and quite obscure niche writers and musicians can find an outlet for their work given the better business model offered by internet-based selling. I personally buy more books and music because of online availability. Books are the ultimate impulse purchase on a Sunday morning after reading the New York Times book review (online, naturally). Who would now buy a CD without first listening to the music, whereas 15 years ago countless musicians used to sell many mediocre songs bundled with a couple of hits?

Meanwhile, France is looking a bit like DisneyWorld, another American cultural icon that it officially disdains even while the French spend their money there. For Socialist France, like DisneyWorld, is increasingly a wonderful place to visit but definitely not somewhere you'd want to live.