

WEBSITE REVIEW

Websites of Antiquarian Books

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ABSTRACT

The article is based on a survey of websites of antiquarian books. Contents of 14 websites of antiquarian books were analysed. The aspects analysed and interpreted were search facilities, signed editions, reviews, dust jackets, antiquarian books for sale, maintaining 'wants lists', etc. The article concludes that the websites of antiquarian books are helping a long way in bibliographic control of antiquarian books by providing needed information easily.

Keywords: Antiquarian books, websites of antiquarian books

1. INTRODUCTION

Books are probably the only antiquarian sources of knowledge still used by the humankind in their original forms. Antiquarian books (also referred to by various terms such as rare books, used books, collectible titles, out-of-print, etc.) are in demand for centuries for their two basic features: (i) the value of thought contained in them and (ii) the physical elegance, cover design, font styles, and illustrations, (at least for few of the titles). Antiquarian books are mostly collected by bibliophiles, i.e., persons who love to read and admire books. Economic stability is an important feature to sustain interest in antiquarian books. The market, particularly, the demand of antiquarian books keeps fluctuating as per the economic trends, which themselves keeps changing as per space and time.

The supply of antiquarian books is not very steady. Wars, recessions, business trends, and technological developments have their own impact on the supply of antiquarian books. There was a time when it was very difficult for a bibliophile to trace and acquire antiquarian books. Thanks to the Internet and other related developments that helped the antiquarian book market to flourish. There are various websites of antiquarian books using which the bibliophiles can now acquire antiquarian books easily saving their time and even money. This article presents a survey-based analysis of selected websites of antiquarian books.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

- ✂ To know the access points provided by websites of antiquarian books under simple and advanced search facilities.
- ✂ To trace the various attractions offered for buying antiquarian books.
- ✂ To find educative and other value-added features made available by the websites

3. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

There are many booksellers who are selling antiquarian books through websites. The sample websites were selected by adopting simple random method. For selecting websites search was carried out by using the term 'antiquarian books' in Google search engine. The first link in the retrieved list was to the website named 'Vialibri' (<http://www.vialibri.net/>). Vialibri, provided a list of 18 online vendors of antiquarian books. These 18 websites formed the total population for this study. Out of these 18, Booklooker, (<http://www.booklooker.de/>), Liver-rare-book (<http://www.livre-rare-book.com/indexFR.htm>), and Uniliber (<http://www.uniliber.com/>) are also available in other than English language. So they are excluded from the scope of this study. Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com/>) was also excluded as it offered many

other items in addition to books. Thus the study presents analysis based on survey of remaining 14 websites (Table 1).

4. RELATED LITERATURE

Literature related with the present topic was searched in online version of *LISA* and *LISTA*. Following is a brief review of selected literature:

4.1 Impact of Internet

Tony Durham found that antiquarian book's market has become international due to Internet.¹ Raugust found that Internet has revolutionised all aspects of used and antiquarian book selling.² Holzenberg presented a detail account of changes which have taken place in the second-hand and antiquarian book selling and collecting business through the ability of buy and sell such items via Internet.³ Zupal, specialist in scholarly and antiquarian books, presented an account of his recent experiences, particularly in the area of the revolutionary changes taking place in the bookselling and book collecting business, notably in the field of book websites.⁴

4.2 Cost Factor

Antiquarian books websites provide opportunity to search books across the globe along with their prices.⁵ One can even bargain for the price. Antiquarian books market on the web has, therefore, become affordable.⁵ According to Reese the reason for cost cutting is due to

modus operandi of the web-based antiquarian booksellers, i.e., they operate from home and save on payrolls, rent and other overheads.⁶

4.3 Bibliographic Control

Reese also stated that Internet has made it possible to acquit millions of people with the existence of antiquarian books. A detailed account of tools that are available on the Internet for hunting antiquarian books has provided by Tony Durham who believed that the web has taken the chaos out of buying antiquarian books.¹ Harper⁵ and Ahearn⁷ discussed about the Internet's role in spreading information about antiquarian books and their help in searching.

4.4 Value Addition

Websites of antiquarian books, through links to special articles, help to know more about rare and antiquarian books. Their glossaries help even in judging first editions of antiquarian books.⁸ Hogan describes web resources that offer tips on how libraries can price old books to be sold.⁹

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Search facility is the most magical features of the Internet. Invariably almost all websites help search contents through search option and or through links. Websites of antiquarian books like most search engines provide simple as well as advanced search facility.

Table 1. List of surveyed websites

Name of the website	Web address
Antiquarian bookseller's Association of America (ABAA)	http://www.abaa.org/
ABE books	http://clickserve.cc-dt.com/
Antikvariat	http://www.antikvariat.net/
Antiqbok	http://www.antiqbook.com/
Albris	http://www.albris.com/
Biblio	http://www.anrdoezrs.net/
Bibliophile Bookbase	http://www.bibliophile.net
Bibliopoly	http://www.bibliopoly.com/
ChooseBooks (ZVAB)	http://www.choosebooks.com/
The International Legue Antiquarian booksellers (ILAB)	http://www.ilab-lila.com/
The Independent Online Booksellers Association (IOBA)	http://www.iobabooks.com/
MereMagnum	http://www.maremagnum.com
Booksatabfa	http://www.booksatpbfa.com/
Prolibri	http://www.prolibri.com/

5.1 Simple Search Facility

Simple search facility on the specific website of antiquarian books allows searching with minimum access points. Under simple search facility the surveyed websites provided the following access points (Table 2). Out of total 14, the two websites did not provide author and title access points under simple search facility. However, they provided the 'keyword' option. This option can be used to search antiquarian books by author and title. Table 1 reveals that 'keyword' search facility is provided by almost all (92.85 per cent) websites of antiquarian books. This means that 'keyword' as an access point is not just preferred for searching modern documents but even antiquarian books. Many websites of antiquarian books (78.57 per cent) provided the facility to search books by author and titles. Therefore, keyword,

Table 2. Simple search facility

Access point provided	No. of websites	Percentage
Keyword	13	92.85
Author	11	78.57
Title	11	78.57
ISBN	04	28.57
Binding	03	21.42

author, and title formed the core of simple search facility. Almost one third (28.42 per cent) websites of antiquarian books under this study enabled search by ISBN. Three websites (21.42 per cent) enabled to specify the search by types of binding, i.e., hard or soft bound books.

5.2 Advanced Search Facility

Advanced search facility is a common feature of most search engines. The advanced search facility enables to search by many more access points than simple search facility. Also, it enables to delimit the search by as many features as possible. The numbers of access points provided by the advanced search facility in this study are listed in Table 3.

Total 33 search/specifying elements have been provided by websites of antiquarian books. Nineteen search elements were provided by two or more websites and 14 search elements were unique, i.e., they were available on single but different-different website.

Author and title were the two access points available on 92.85 per cent websites. Search by keyword and price has been enabled by 85.71 per cent websites. Price as a search element was highlighted by 85 per cent websites.

Table 3. Access points provided under advanced search facility

Access points provided	No. of websites	Percentage
Author	13	92.85
Title	13	92.85
Keyword	12	86.71
Price	12	86.71
Date/year of publication	10	71.42
Publisher	10	71.42
First edition	10	71.42
Singed	09	64.28
With dust jacket	09	64.28
No. of entries to be displayed	09	64.28
Sort results by	09	64.28
Binding	08	57.14
Show titles added	08	57.14
Booksellers country	07	50.00
Search whole/individual dealer's database	06	42.85
Display currency	05	35.71
Search document (types of document)	04	28.57
Language	03	21.42
Condition of book	02	14.28
Ship to	02	14.28
With bookseller supplied photos	02	14.28
Booksellers within ... zip code	02	14.28
Time span	02	14.28

5.3 Combined Simple and Advanced Search

When considered together the simple and advanced search facility, all the 14 websites provide facility to search antiquarian books by author title and keywords. It was also found that some of the access points provided by a particular website under simple search facility are also provided under advanced search facility.

5.4 Date of Publication and Publisher

The search option 'date of publication' was provided by 71.42 per cent websites. This option on some websites enables to search antiquarian books published before and after a certain year. Whereas some websites enable search of antiquarian books published between certain years.

Search of antiquarian books by 'publisher' has been enabled by 10 (71.42 per cent) websites. This option which ranks third in terms of frequency of options indicates its importance. The publisher's option is important for two reasons: (i) some books are published by more than one publishers, and (ii) the cost of the same antiquarian book may vary from publisher to publisher (due to the change in the publisher's country and thereby the currency).

5.5 First Edition

Some people have interest in 'first', i.e., to be first customer of a new edition of a car, telephone number in a series, to watch first day first show of a movie and so on. Similarly there are bibliophiles who feel proud in having first edition of an antiquarian book. To fulfill this requirement 71.42 per cent websites have made provision to specify the search of a 'first edition' of desired antiquarian books.

5.6 Signed Books

Authors put their autographs (signatures) on selected books. They also give autographs on their books in response to the request from a visitor. It gives a special feeling to have an author signed copy of book. Bibliophiles like to collect books which have autograph of its author. Nine (64.28 per cent) websites have the option 'signed' (editions) of antiquarian books.

5.7 With Dust Jacket

Dust jacket of a book is an essential deterrent for wear and tear of a book. In addition, for the publishing industry it is a very good publicity tool. So, some books particularly, books of artistic value, novels, have beautifully designed dust jackets. Most of the time the picture on the dust jacket very intelligently represents the contents of the book, i.e., they are thematic dust jackets. Bibliophiles persuade hard to have antiquarian books 'with

dust jacket' for the artistic value. Nine (64.28 per cent) websites enable search of antiquarian books 'with dust jacket'.

5.8 Number of Entries Displayed on Each Page

This feature on the websites specifies how many entries of the retrieved antiquarian books should be displayed on a single screen. Number of entries can be selected as per the choice on the display screen. Under this option antiquarian books websites provide pull down menus to choose to the number of entries to be displayed. The option ranges from 5-15 entries per screen. A fairly large number of websites (64.28 per cent) provided this option.

5.9 Binding

'Binding' as a search factor helps to choose from hard and soft binding options. Types of binding affects price of the antiquarian books. This option has been provided by eight (57.14 per cent) websites of antiquarian books under the advanced search facility. The binding option is also provided under simple search facility by three (21.42 per cent) websites. So taken together, simple and advanced search this facility is being provided by 11 (78.57 per cent) websites.

5.10 Sort Results

The sort results helps in searching by various access points (Table 4). Also, the search could be delimited by features like year of publication, binding, etc. Search results are arranged in some logical order so as to enable the searcher to locate an entry in the retrieved list. Nine (64.28 per cent) websites of antiquarian books provide search results by various ways. The options provided under the facility 'sort result' included: Oldest on the site, images, bookseller's names, etc.

5.11 Show Titles Added

This search specification is provided by eight (57.14 per cent) websites of antiquarian books. By using this option search can be restricted to retrieve titles added to the website's database recently, i.e., in last one or two weeks or up to a specific date from the date of upload to the database. This option serves as current awareness service.

5.12 Bookseller's Country

Online book market is an international market, which helps the searcher in getting the antiquarian book from a specific country. The reason for favouring a specific country may be that the bibliophile wants to get the antiquarian book from his mother or favoured country. Price can be the another reason for knowing bookseller's country, as the price may change from country to country

on account of changes in currency rates. Seven websites (50 per cent) of antiquarian books provided the option 'bookseller's country'. 'From bookseller in ... country', 'search in ... country', 'geographical market' are the other names given to this option. This is a pull down embedded option.

5.13 Whole or Individual Dealer's Database

To enhance the scope of the antiquarian books market the websites of antiquarian books are working on a 'border-less market principle'. Accordingly, 42.85 per cent websites of antiquarian books under this study provided the option search in either 'whole database or individual dealer's database'. This means these websites maintain links to two separate sets of databases, i.e., a cumulative database covering the antiquarian books available with all vendors in the group and separate database of antiquarian books available with each individual dealer. The second set of database is useful to the searcher who has specific dealer in mind.

5.14 Display Currency

Antiquarian books may be available with dealers in different country, resulting in variance of prices of the book. A bibliophile may be interested in getting an antiquarian book offered in a specific currency. To fulfill this requirement 35.71 per cent websites of antiquarian books have provided the option 'display currency'. This option is also a pull-down embedded option.

5.15 Searches by Document Types

Most online booksellers of antiquarian books hold stock of various types of documents. This includes books, autographs, maps, movies, audio material, etc. However, only four out of 14 websites provided the facility to further limit the search by types of document. This search limiting factor is useful for a searcher who is looking for a specific type of antiquarian book.

5.16 Language of the Book

This search option is offered by just three (21.42 per cent) websites. By using this option a searcher can specify his language interest as far as an antiquarian book is concerned. One of the reasons why many websites of antiquarian books did not provide this option may be that, in most cases, the author and title automatically delimits the language of the book, unless off course, if the book is published in more than one language.

5.17 Condition of the Book

Being old and or used, the antiquarian books may not be in a good physical condition. Depending on the

intensity of the need, and the attitude a bibliophile decides what physical condition of the desired book he/she prefers. Only two out of 14 websites have provided option such as 'any condition', 'better condition', 'fine condition' to choose from.

5.18 Ship To

A bibliophile may be searching for a book seller who can ship/sent the antiquarian book to particular country. Only two websites have provided an option to choose the country where they want the antiquarian book to be sent to. This option might not have been provided by the more websites as some booksellers may not able to supply books to a specific country due to political reasons. The 'Ship To' option has a pull down sub-options such as 'any country', UK, US, Canada, etc.

5.19 Bookseller's Geographical Distance

A bibliophile may be interested to buy an antiquarian book only if it is available within a specific geographical distance. This requirement is fulfilled by two websites by providing the option 'booksellers within 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50 miles' of the (specified) zip code. This is a great help for those who intend to buy an antiquarian book from a nearby area.

5.20 Time Span

This search option is different from the year of publication. This option covers the time for the antiquarian books where date of publication is not known and or not bothered by the bibliophile. Two of the 14 websites has provided this option with a further pull-down to choose a specific century.

5.21 Discounts and Other Attractions

Discounts are direct monetary attractions offered to attract bibliophiles. Three versions of discounts are noticed on the websites of antiquarian books studied in this survey. They are: discounts (2), free shipping (2), and best buy (1), Return policy (5), 100 per cent secure shopping (2), money- back guarantee (1), gift certificates (1), etc., are some other attractions for the bibliophile on the websites of antiquarian books. Shopping rate, your account, view basket/shopping cart, are the captions under which the customer can get required information for buying antiquarian books. Through these links the bibliophile can also update his purchases. Information under these links makes online book purchasing easier.

5.22 Educative and Other Value-added Features

The world of antiquarian books is a specialised one and has its own jargon. Proper knowledge of technical

terms related with antiquarian books helps in their selection and acquisition. Seven (50 per cent) websites have provided educative information about antiquarian books under heading such as 'glossary (3), learn more about rare books (2), articles (1) and resources (1).

5.23 Reviews and Interviews

Reviews of antiquarian books, and interviews of authors of such books has been made available by one website each. Information given under these links enable the bibliophile in choosing proper antiquarian book.

5.24 Publicity

Websites of antiquarian books are meant to sell books. They intend to enhance the business by staying in contact with the customer. Facilities under the various links have been used to reach the bibliophiles.

Newsletter and press release have been used to provide information about events in the recent past. The 'events' link has been used for communicating forthcoming events. 'Book fairs' link provides information about venue, menu (i.e. participating dealers, their specialization, etc.) and dates of forthcoming fairs of antiquarian books. Blog has been used by these websites for two way communication with the bibliophiles.

5.25 Caring for Libraries

There may be some libraries looking for a specific antiquarian book. Three out of 14 websites of antiquarian books have a link named 'libraries'. This link enables libraries to select and acquire antiquarian books like individual bibliophiles. Through this link these websites give special treatment to libraries as customers.

Table 4. Types of links for publicity

Types of link	No. of websites
Newsletter	3
Book fairs	2
Blogs	2
Events	1
Press release	1

5.26 Wants List

There are six websites (42.85 per cent) that enable the bibliophile to register their demand for getting an antiquarian book, which he wants to have but is not available in the present database. An antiquarian bookseller keeps track of the requests registered in the wants list. As and when the bookseller finds the requested antiquarian book he informs the requester accordingly.

5.27 The Reverse Flow: Selling Antiquarian Books

Websites of antiquarian books not only help the bibliophile to get rare and antiquarian books of their interest, but also help the holder of antiquarian books in selling such books. The reasons for selling antiquarian books by individuals to antiquarian booksellers can be either monetary need or lost of interest in the antiquarian book.¹⁰

5.28 Usual Links

Last, but of equal importance, are the links usually available on any website are also available on the websites of antiquarian books surveyed during the present study. These include: home, about us, contact us, FAQ, and help.

6. CONCLUSION

The online facility has revolutionised the antiquarian books market. It offers something for every concerned party which includes the bibliophile, libraries, individual who wants to sell antiquarian books and of course the booksellers of antiquarian books. All in all, the websites of antiquarian books are contributing in a great way in the rapid and universal movement of antiquarian books by providing adequate access points. These also provide a very good buying and educating information for the bibliophiles.

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