

Companies destroying books to train AI models

31st August 2026



The Federal Trade Commission in the USA is being urged to investigate AI companies for allegedly buying rare books in bulk and then destroying them. Groups like the Consumer Federation of America have asked the FTC to look into

claims that AI companies are digitizing the books to train their large language models (LLMs). The process includes breaking the spines of the rare works, scanning the pages, and then destroying them. Some destroyed books may be among the last surviving copies of the original texts. Critics argue that such books are historically important and that it is not socially acceptable to burn them. One critic said: "The rarer a book is, the more carefully we should preserve it."

The bulk buying of books is creating a dilemma for stores that specialize in rare and antique books. They are receiving large orders for some rather valuable items, but are then questioning the ethics of destroying books. The Wall Street Journal reported that rare and obscure book sales have suddenly surged. Booksellers have been getting unusually large orders for out-of-print, and sometimes valuable books. It added that some books are apparently being bought not to be read, but to be digitized for AI training. Earlier this year, the Washington Post reported that the companies are spending a fortune on millions of books that are being used to help train AI assistants.

Sources: cbsnews.com / wsj.com / novaramedia.com

Writing

Old books should never be destroyed. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

investigate / AI companies / rare books / large language models / pages / critics / rare / bulk buying / dilemma / antique / ethics / obscure / spending a fortune / AI assistants

True / False

- 1) The Federal Trade Commission in the USA is being investigated. T / F
- 2) It is alleged AI companies are breaking the spines of rare books. T / F
- 3) Critics said it was socially acceptable to burn books. T / F
- 4) One critic said we should preserve all books. T / F
- 5) Rare and antique book stores have a dilemma over selling the rare books. T / F
- 6) Some bookstores are questioning the morality of destroying rare books. T / F
- 7) The article says book stores are reprinting out-of-print books. T / F
- 8) A newspaper said AI companies are spending a fortune on books. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. urged | a. awkward situation |
| 2. allegedly | b. assertions |
| 3. claims | c. seemingly |
| 4. obscure | d. look after |
| 5. preserve | e. morals |
| 6. dilemma | f. encouraged |
| 7. ethics | g. a huge amount |
| 8. surged | h. reportedly |
| 9. apparently | i. suddenly increased |
| 10. a fortune | j. little known |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you think about what you read?
- b) What are the ethics of destroying books?
- c) What are your favourite books?
- d) Why do AI companies need to scan old books?
- e) How do you feel when you are in a bookstore?
- f) What should companies do after scanning the books?
- g) How useful are AI assistants to you?
- h) What questions would you like to ask AI company bosses?

Phrase Match

1. investigate AI companies for allegedly
 2. The process includes breaking the
 3. among the last surviving copies
 4. such books are historically
 5. it is not socially acceptable
 6. bulk buying of books is creating a
 7. specialize in rare
 8. obscure book sales
 9. companies are spending
 10. used to help
- a. spines of the rare works
 - b. and antique books
 - c. to burn them
 - d. a fortune
 - e. dilemma
 - f. buying rare books
 - g. of the original texts
 - h. train AI assistants
 - i. important
 - j. have suddenly surged

Discussion – Student B

- a) What do you think of books?
- b) Do you prefer reading paper books or digital books?
- c) What's the oldest book you own?
- d) Should there be laws about bulk buying rare books?
- e) What do you think of the smell of books?
- f) How do you feel when you are in a library?
- g) How do you feel about rare books being destroyed?
- h) Are AI companies too big and powerful?

Spelling

1. Federal Trade mCmsoisnio
2. being urged to ntteegiaivs AI companies
3. lgleydea buying rare books in bulk
4. breaking the sipens of the rare works
5. not socially bctaeplcae
6. the more carefully we should revprsee it
7. creating a mldamie
8. rare and taineug books
9. orders for some rather uelablva items
10. rare and oercsub book sales
11. books are penatlrapp being bought
12. companies are spending a nfetrou

Answers – Synonym Match

1. f	2. h	3. b	4. j	5. d
6. a	7. e	8. i	9. c	10. g

Comprehension Questions

Listen to / read the news article. Answer these questions.
(Answers are on p. 27 of the 27-page PDF.)

1.	What is being asked to investigate AI companies?
2.	What does the article say AI companies are using books to train?
3.	What are AI companies breaking?
4.	What do some critics believe it is unacceptable to do to rare books?
5.	What did a critic say we should do with rarer books?
6.	What is bulk book buying creating for rare book sellers?
7.	What are booksellers questioning?
8.	What does a newspaper say has surged?
9.	What did the newspaper say books are being digitized for?
10.	How much are AI companies spending on books?

Speaking – Book Genres

Rank these with your partner. Put the best book genres at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- Fantasy
- Philosophy
- Romance
- Self-help
- Science fiction
- Horror
- Comedy
- Biography

Answers – True False

1	F	2	T	3	F	4	F	5	T	6	T	7	F	8	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.