



## Studying Regional Variations in Globalization

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We would expect to find that people view globalization differently depending on where they live. While an international opinion survey would probably be the preferable way to measure these differences in understanding, this article proposes a much cheaper proxy: freely available information about books on the topic of

globalization that people buy in online stores around the world. Using this data is clearly inferior to a well-designed opinion survey in that it cannot provide answers to a full set of research questions, but it can tell us which aspects of globalization are perceived to be important in different regions of the world, and it might illuminate the structure of popular discussions about globalization. It also has the advantages of being non-invasive and of capturing the whole population of users of a popular online bookstore, probably more than could be reached by an opinion survey. Of course, given that this data is about the purchasing choices made by individuals among books offered by publishers, it is something of a halfway house between individuals' views of globalization—such as might be expressed in answers to an opinion survey or in postings on social media—and the views of globalization produced and promoted by the media and publishing industries. Enough caveats: what can the data tell us?

Amazon currently has 11 stores: Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Spain, the UK, and the US. Of these all but the Brazilian and Indian stores offer an API that allows automatic searching. We therefore wrote a program that retrieved the top 100 books with the keyword “globalization” (or the equivalent in the relevant language) every day from these nine Amazon stores and archived the results in a database. This should be done over a period of at least several months to overcome temporary biases toward particular titles. However, as a proof of concept this article presents some results based on 15 days of data from June 2013.

## Book titles

First, let us look at the words used in the titles of the books. We removed words such as “globalization,” “global,” “world,” “international,” “introduction,” and “edition.” Then we combined parts of speech and near-synonyms such as “politics”/“political” and “economy”/“economics.” Finally we calculated word frequencies. Rather than present tables of dry figures, we visualized the 50 most frequently occurring words in each store using [wordle.net](http://wordle.net); Japanese and Chinese need some extra processing before analysis is possible so are omitted here.

**Figure 1:** Globalization book title keywords in seven Amazon.com markets: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, United States



politics  
new  
capitalism  
first  
environment  
markets  
great  
revolution  
rights  
third  
asia  
critical  
health  
strategy  
challenge  
future  
migration  
china  
studies  
age  
change  
democracy  
era  
poverty  
nation  
society  
crisis  
industry  
development  
theory  
education  
terrorism  
culture  
century  
america  
21st  
power  
governance  
policy

city **economy**

territoire  
société  
enjeux  
france  
économie  
géographie  
nouveau  
entreprise  
histoire  
dynamiques  
européen  
heure  
droit  
autre  
marché  
contre  
état  
limites  
comprendre  
leçons  
acteurs  
tourisme  
afrique  
mutations  
urbain  
géopolitique  
fait  
programme  
crise  
précis  
jours  
art  
essai  
pouvoir  
politique  
finance  
guerre  
compact  
grandes  
ère  
capitalisme  
siècle  
grande  
questions  
francophonie  
après

neoliberalismus  
kapitalismus  
geschichte  
krisen  
soziologie  
ende jahrhundert  
zusammenarbeit  
entwicklung  
interkulturelle  
zeitalter  
demokratie  
föderalismus  
gesellschaft  
verantwortung  
geld  
wege  
armut  
weltordnung  
rechtsordnung  
schaffen  
politik  
erklärt  
bank  
westen  
unternehmen  
afrika  
neueuropa  
deutschland  
kultur  
leben  
weltwirtschaft  
indien  
economics  
governance  
management  
china  
amerika  
morgen  
macht  
theorie  
reise

crisi

sociali  
uscita  
migraciones  
potere  
italia  
vita  
commercio  
geografie  
modernità  
nuova  
mercato  
occidente  
civiltà  
società  
diritto  
verità  
mercato  
lavoro  
politica  
genova  
europa  
democrazia  
new  
america  
tempo  
arte  
breve  
secolo  
industria  
cultura  
rivoluzione  
india  
economia  
industria  
cultura  
fine  
contemporanea  
verso  
età  
sviluppo  
nuovi  
libertà  
rischio  
manuale  
storia





historia vuelta neoliberal social democracia sistema viene compromiso derecho orden  
humanos the moderno mercado política pobreza gran  
feminismo pequeña law economía derechos SUR  
desarrollo teoría NUEVO libre educación cómo  
perspectiva infantil crítica europa contemporáneo  
desigualdad ciudadanía sociedad agua integración  
siglo capital poder next control



china challenge changing city crisis critical  
america asia capitalism europe history  
future welfare first business rights modernity  
21st geography real new state education culture society change making governance  
power democracy new art century politics studies relations states markets management  
age perspectives theory development nation human  
issues policy development strategy



Clearly, book purchasers in all the stores are extremely interested in the economic aspects of globalization. The Italian store shows an unusually high association of globalization with “crisis,” which occurs in 11 of the 150 book titles collected. It will be interesting to see whether this association continues over a longer period.

It is also interesting to compare the balance between “future” and “history.” While for Canada, Germany, the UK, and the US the two are more or less the same size, for France, Italy, and Spain we see only “history.” Book titles everywhere tend to emphasize the newness of globalization.

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We also notice differences in the geopolitical associations of globalization. In the US and Canadian stores, “America” is a large presence, with “China” (plus “Asia” for Canada) just making the cut. “Europe” features prominently in all the European stores. The German and Italian stores show the greatest geographical diversity, with China, America, Africa, India, and the West joining Europe and the two home countries. The French results include “France,” “Europe,” and “Africa,” while those for the Spanish store include only “Europe.”

## Co-purchasing networks

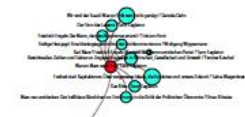
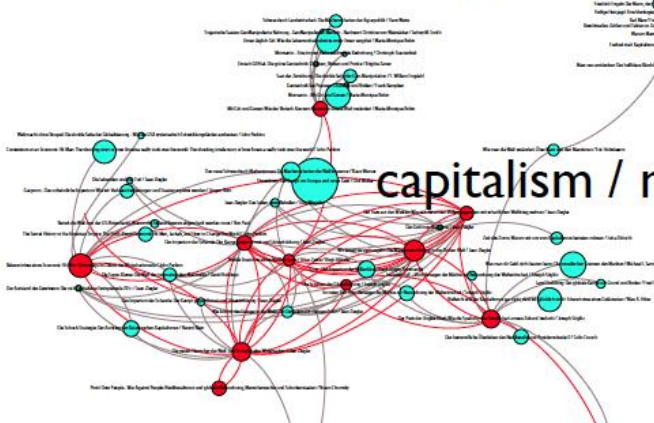
This simple analysis of the text of book titles has revealed some interesting regional variations, but we would like to get a better sense of the issues associated with globalization in different countries. When we browse in an Amazon store we see co-purchasing information (“Customers Who Bought This Item Also Bought...”). By gathering this information for each book returned in the search results for “globalization,” we can see which topics are closely associated with globalization in the different book markets. These co-purchasing data can also suggest the structure of debates about globalization in different regions: following Kreb’s analysis of political book purchases around the 2008 US presidential election (<http://www.orgnet.com/divided.html>), will we see mutually unconnected “islands” of texts suggesting a polarized or fragmented popular understanding of globalization or a community of readers linked by knowledge (or at least ownership) of common texts?

In the interest of brevity, here we will confine ourselves to comparing co-purchasing networks from the German, Japanese, and US stores. In the network diagrams that follow, the red nodes are books that have been returned in the search results for “globalization” and the blue nodes are books that have also been purchased by people who have bought books on globalization. The larger the node, the higher the book’s mean sales ranking over the two-week period in June 2013. The networks have been restricted to the 200 books with the highest mean sales rankings. Smaller components (“islands”) have been omitted. The words in large font size are labels we have subjectively attached to sub-groups of books within each network in an attempt to give a broad sense of their content; the reader is invited to improve these thematic labels. Titles and authors of individual books can be seen by clicking on the image.

**Figure 2:** Co-purchasing networks in three Amazon.com markets: Germany, Japan, USA

biotechnology

Marxism



capitalism / neoliberalism

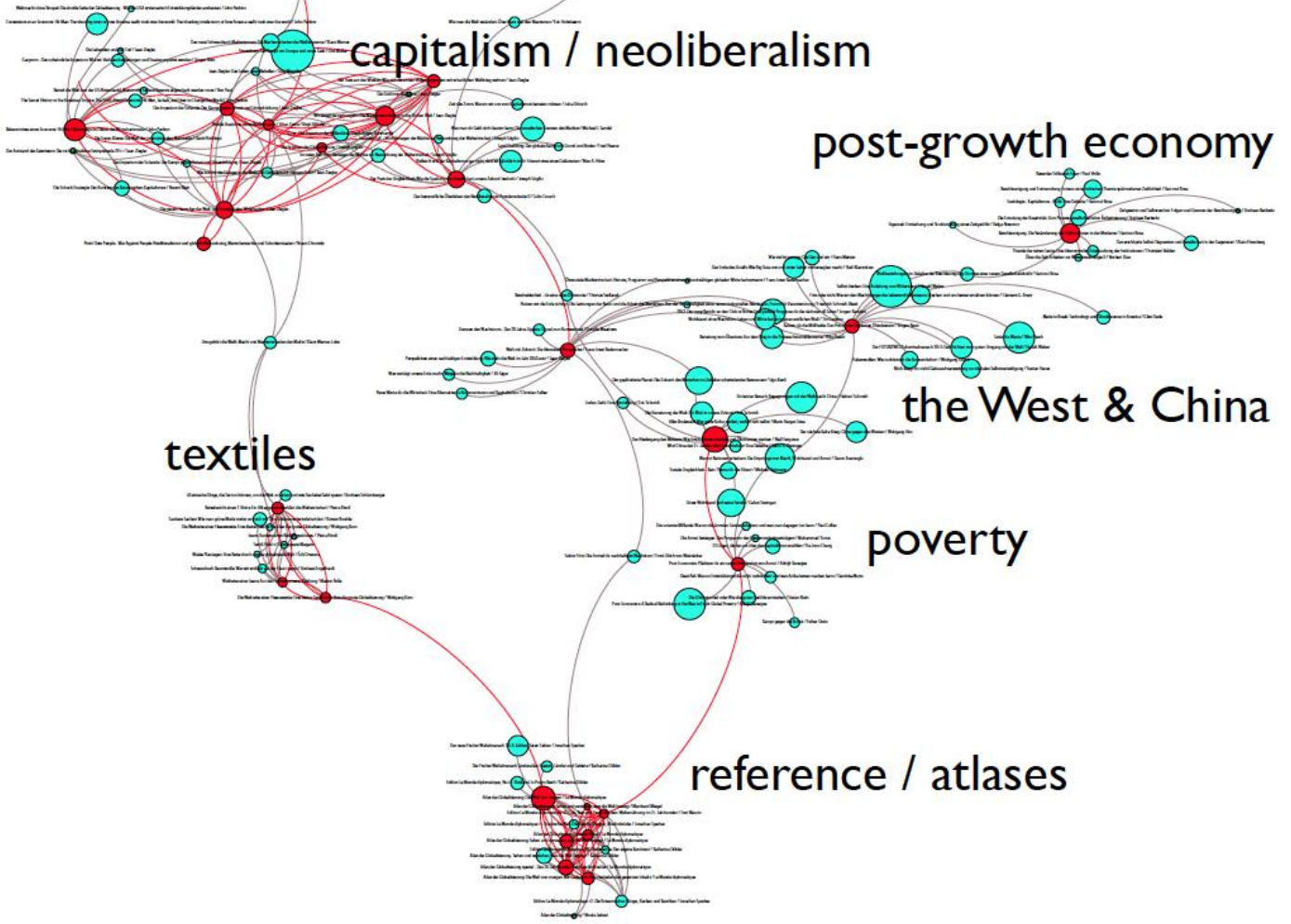
post-growth economy

textiles

the West & China

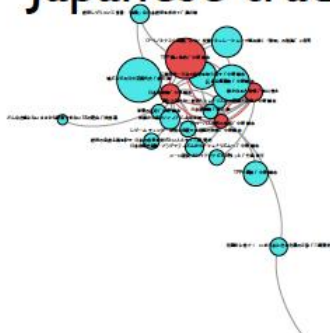
poverty

reference / atlases





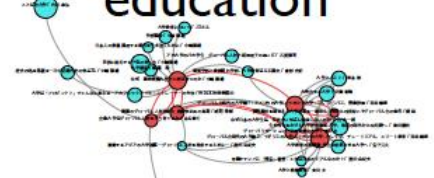
# Japanese trade policy



# children / migration



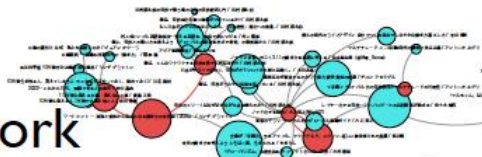
# education



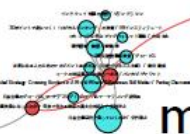
# China-Korea-Japan



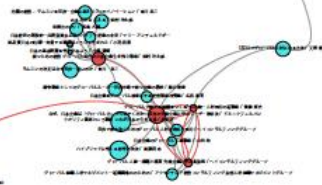
# work

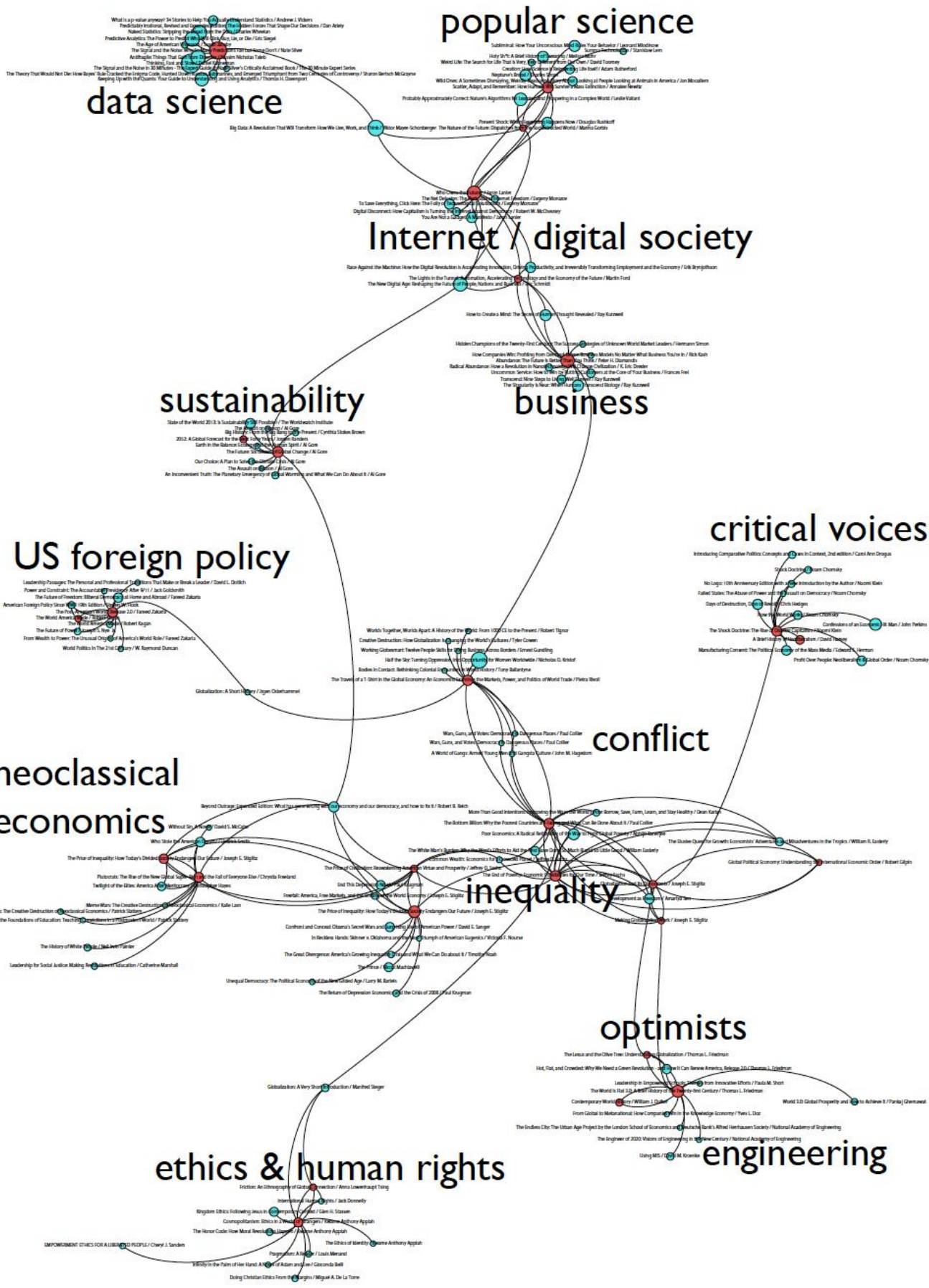


# companies



# management





The first thing we notice is that the German and US networks consist of one large component whereas the Japanese network is split into two components; the slightly smaller Japanese component is concerned with trade policy—including books debating the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership—and Japan’s relations with its neighbors. The other component centers on business and management, but also includes books aimed at people concerned about the impact of globalization on their workplace and books on university education and the children of migrants living in Japan. Poverty, inequality, and the environment are not major topics.

These co-purchasing data can also suggest the structure of debates about globalization in different regions...

By contrast, the German and US store networks both have one large component that includes multiple perspectives on globalization ranging from the highly critical accounts of Jean Ziegler and Noam Chomsky to the more optimistic positions taken by, for example, Thomas Friedman. This suggests that the debate on globalization in those countries is lively but not completely polarized. Nevertheless, the overall tone of the best-selling German books on globalization and the titles bought along with them is considerably more skeptical of the benefits of globalization than that in the US store.

## **Final word**

The preliminary results presented in this article suggest that using purchasing data from online book stores, despite its limitations, is a promising way of estimating what people in a given country are likely to understand by and associate with globalization. In order to present firm conclusions we need to gather data over a longer period, and it would be desirable to expand the coverage to include other regions and countries.

## **Tags**

[regional studies](#)

[globalization](#)





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