

US tabloids less aggressive than British: experts

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A man buys a copy of the British tabloid newspaper News of the World from a newspaper vendor in central London on July 10. US tabloid newspapers including ones owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation are less aggressive than their British counterparts, partly due to readers' differing demands, experts say.

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In general US readers want fewer of the salacious details which British tabloids dish up, including via questionable ethical methods such as those highlighted in the current storm over [phone hacking](#).

"The tabloid press in the US is different from that in the UK or other

countries. There is more competition in the tabloid press in the UK," said Rich Hanley, professor in communications at Quinnipiac University.

In the United States "they don't tend to go too far. They understand the audience in America, who want details, but there is a line when these details become unacceptable," he told AFP.

Consequently he doesn't think the scandal which has engulfed Murdoch in Britain -- where he closed the weekly [News](#) of the World, and has lost two senior executives so far -- will grow so big on this side of the Atlantic.

"I don't think that the depth of the scandal in the UK will be matched in the US. I don't see Murdoch's US media properties such as the [New York Post](#) and Fox News following those same practices."

For Timothy Karr of Freepress, a non-partisan US group working for media reform, "tabloids try to print news that is more sensational, but that doesn't mean they all have the same practices."

"What we are finding increasingly within the culture that surrounds Murdoch's tabloids is a willingness to violate the laws and to disregard basic standards in order to beat the competition and be the first to get the story."

In the US however "they recognize that they need to be careful, that there is a high public awareness that some of their practices may be indeed illegal," he added.

Paul Janensch, professor emeritus of journalism at Quinnipiac University, says: "Breaking the law to get information is not a common practice by any [news organization](#) in the US.

"Maybe the 'supermarket tabloids' skirt the limits of the law from time to time -- and might not have codes of ethics -- but they are not really newspapers," he added, citing publications such as the National Enquirer.

Janensch recalls a phone hacking case in the US in 1998, when the Cincinnati Enquirer published an expose of the business practices of banana and fruit giant Chiquita.



Chicago Sun-Times newspapers are offered for sale in 2009 in Chicago, Illinois. US tabloid newspapers including ones owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation are less aggressive than their British counterparts, partly due to readers' differing demands, experts say.

"Chiquita fought back, claiming its confidential voicemails had been obtained illegally," he noted. Eventually the newspaper retracted the expose, ran a front-page apology and paid millions of dollars to avoid a

lawsuit.

"The reporter was fired, pled guilty to two felony counts and was sentenced to probation. The editor was removed."

After the current scandal, "I think Murdoch's newspapers and other [News Corp](#) platforms will be extra careful not to break the law in pursuit of a hot story," he said.

"But I doubt that his 'popular' newspapers will become more restrained. Sensation sells in the UK."

Although many of News Corp's US businesses are successful -- such as [Fox News](#), the Fox Broadcasting Company and 20th Century Fox -- Murdoch's efforts to make newspapers here resemble popular British titles "have failed," he said.

For example Murdoch bought the San Antonio News-Express, the Chicago Sun-Times and the Boston Herald-American.

"Both the Sun-Times and the Herald-American, which he renamed the Herald, are tabloids. He made all of them more sensational. It did not work, and so he sold them," said Janensch.

"He did the same with the New York Post. News Corp still owns the Post. It gets a lot of attention. It is like a UK 'popular' newspaper with its racy coverage and its openly political news content.

"But it loses money," he said.

Murdoch's struggle to deal with the crisis is meanwhile being watched with amusement by non News Corp titles in the US.

The day after Murdoch was grilled by British lawmakers, New York's Daily News voiced skepticism about his claim that it was "the most humble day of my life."

Murdoch "has been called many things over the years -- but never humble or naive," said the newspaper, also questioning his attempts to lay the blame on his executives.

"If the head of the company isn't responsible, who is?" it said.

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