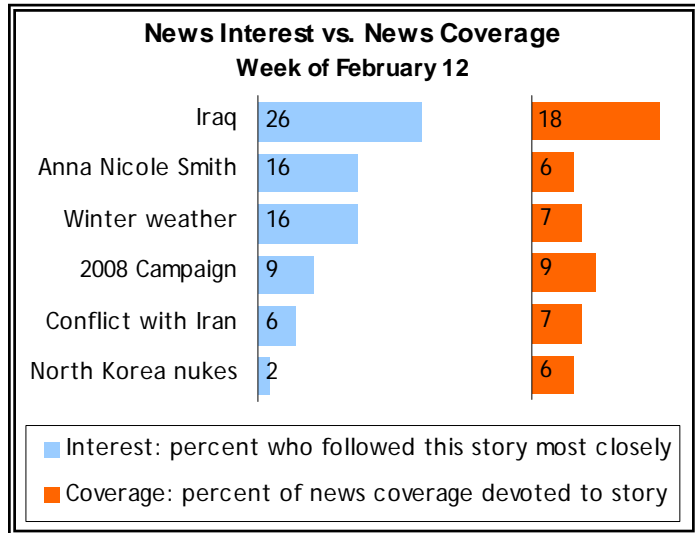FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Friday, February 23, 2007

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
Andrew Kohut, Director
Kim Parker, Senior Researcher

Iraq Most Closely Followed and Covered News Story

The public and the news media divided their attention last week among the top international stories, harsh winter weather, politics and the ongoing saga surrounding the death of Anna Nicole Smith. The Iraq war remained the No. 1 story both in terms of public interest and news coverage, however, the public hung on to the Anna Nicole Smith story, even as press coverage began to taper off.

News Interest vs. News Coverage
Week of February 12

Story	Interest	Coverage
Iraq	26	18
Anna Nicole Smith	16	6
Winter weather	16	7
2008 Campaign	9	9
Conflict with Iran	6	7
North Korea nukes	2	6

■ Interest: percent who followed this story most closely
■ Coverage: percent of news coverage devoted to story

The Smith audience is quite distinct. Women were twice as likely as men to list this as their top story (22% vs. 11%), and younger women continued to be the most hooked. Nearly three-in-ten (29%) of women under the age of 50 listed this as their top story – about half as many named the Iraq war. For these younger women, cable news was clearly the place to go last week for coverage of the story. While 6% of coverage on all media sectors (newspapers, network TV, cable TV, radio and the Internet) was devoted to Smith's death, fully 20% of cable news focused on this story. At the height of the media's feeding frenzy (the two day period immediately following Smith's death), 24% of all coverage and 50% of cable news was devoted to the story.

Anna Nicole Bests Bush

Whether they were following news about Smith closely or not, her name is on the tip of many Americans' tongues these days. Fully 38% of the public volunteered Smith's name when asked who they had heard the most about in the news lately. She edged out George W. Bush by a significant margin (28% named the president) and left Democratic presidential hopefuls Barack Obama (3%) and Hillary Clinton (3%) in the dust.
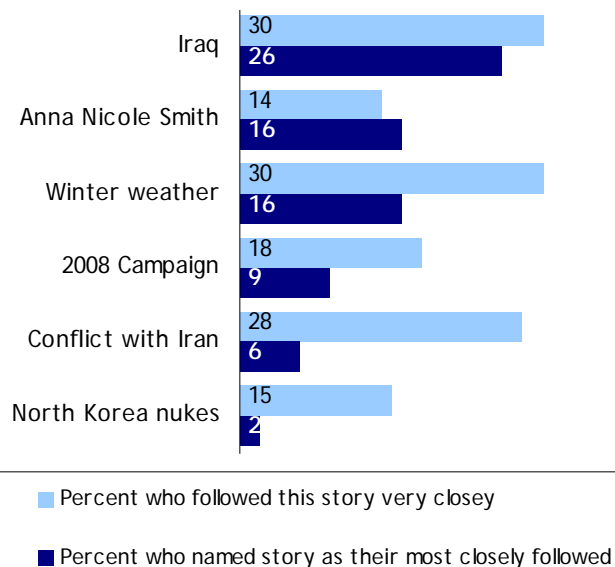
These findings are based on the most recent installment of the weekly *News Interest Index*, a new initiative by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index, building on the Center's longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, examines news interest as it relates to the news media's agenda. The weekly survey is conducted in conjunction with The Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index,* which monitors the news reported by major newspaper, television, radio and online news outlets on an ongoing basis.

Memorable People in the News Week of Feb 12	
Heard the most about in the news lately…	**%**
Anna Nicole Smith	38
George Bush	28
Barack Obama	3
Hillary Clinton	3
Britney Spears	1
Nancy Pelosi	1
Other	9
No answer	17
	100

The index measures news attentiveness in a variety of ways. Using the Center's traditional approach, interest in individual news stories is evaluated by asking respondents if they have been following a story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. In addition, the public's interest in specific stories is measured *relative to* interest in the other top stories of the week. Respondents are given a list of the six top stories and asked which one they have followed most closely. This measure gives a greater approximation of the public's attentiveness to the weekly menu of news as offered up by the news

Measuring News Interest Week of February 12

Story	Percent who followed this story very closely	Percent who named story as their most closely followed
Iraq	30	26
Anna Nicole Smith	14	16
Winter weather	30	16
2008 Campaign	18	9
Conflict with Iran	28	6
North Korea nukes	15	2

media. The weekly survey also includes open-ended questions where respondents are asked to name the first news story or newsmaker that comes to mind. All of these measures are taken into account when making comparisons to the amount of news coverage the various stories have received.

For the 7th consecutive week in a row, the situation in Iraq was the story the public was most interested in. Three-in-ten Americans followed the Iraq war very closely this past week, and 26% said this was the story they followed most closely. The Iraq war, both the policy debate and events on the ground, has consistently led news coverage as well. Roughly one-fifth of the newshole has been devoted to Iraq in each the past four weeks.

The gender gap on the Iraq story has sharpened over the past two weeks, as many women have been drawn toward the Anna Nicole Smith story. This past week, 33% of men said Iraq was the story they followed most closely. This compares to only 20% of women. Democrats continue to be somewhat more focused than Republicans on Iraq news – 30% vs. 21%, respectively, listed Iraq as their top news story last week.

Not only is Iraq the most closely followed story, it's the one many Americans would like to learn even more about. When asked which of the week's top news stories they wished they could devote more time to, 15% of the public named Iraq. Nearly as many (12%) pointed to the 2008 presidential campaign, and another 10% said they wish they had more time to follow reports about Iran's possible connection to Iraqi insurgents. Very few Americans said they hadn't gotten their fill of news about Anna Nicole Smith – only 3% said they wish they had more time to follow this story. For the most part, the public was fairly content with the amount of time they had to focus on the major news stories of the week. A 62% majority said they didn't wish they had time to follow any of the top stories more closely.

"Stories Deserving More of my Time?"	
Wish you had more time to follow…?	**%**
Iraq situation	15
2008 campaign	12
Conflict with Iran	10
North Korea agreement	8
Weather	5
Anna Nicole Smith	3
None	62
Don't know	2

Figures add to more than 100% because respondents could choose more than one story.

The weather is always a popular subject with the public and the news media, and last week's winter storm, which snarled traffic at airports and on highways up and down the East Coast, was no exception. Fully 30% of the public followed news about the weather very closely (equal to the percent that followed Iraq very closely), and 16% said this was the story they followed most closely last week. The media devoted more time to the storm than they had to the frigid temperatures the week before. Seven percent of the newshole was devoted to this topic, up from 3% the previous week.

Of the two remaining major international stories of the week – bad news on Iran and potentially good news about North Korea – the public paid more attention to the Iran story. Nearly three-in-ten Americans (28%) paid very close attention to reports that Iran may be

supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq, and 6% said this was the story they followed most closely. Media coverage of this issue was substantial – 7% of the newshole was devoted to the Iran story making it the third most covered story overall and the top story on the front page of the nation's newspapers. The coverage encompassed both the Iranian government's possible connection to Iraqi insurgents and worries about a potential military conflict between the U.S. and Iran. Republicans were much more likely than Democrats to say this was their top story: 11% vs. 3%, respectively.

North Korea's agreement to disable its main nuclear facility in exchange for energy assistance, though it received almost as much media coverage as the Iran story, attracted relatively little interest from the public. Fifteen percent said they followed the story very closely and only 2% said it was their top story.

Interest in the 2008 presidential campaign fell off slightly this past week, though coverage remained steady: 18% of the public followed campaign-related news very closely, and 9% said this was their top story. Mitt Romney's formal announcement that he is a candidate for the Republican nomination didn't galvanize the GOP faithful, as Democrats continued to follow news about the '08 campaign more closely than Republicans.

About the News Interest Index

The *News Interest Index* is a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press aimed at gauging the public's interest in and reaction to major news events.

This project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index*, an ongoing content analysis of the news. The News Coverage Index catalogues the news from top news organizations across five major sectors of the media: newspapers, network television, cable television, radio and the internet. Each week (from Sunday through Friday) PEJ will compile this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey will collect data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of six projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

Andrew Kohut, Director
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors
Carolyn Funk, Richard Wike and Kim Parker, Senior Researchers
Nilanthi Samaranayake, Survey and Data Manager
April Clark, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf and Dan Cox, Research Associates
James Albrittain, Executive Assistant

Q.1A   Can you tell me the name of the person you've heard the most about in the news lately? **[PROBE IF NECESSARY:** Just the name that comes to mind FIRST when you think about who's been in the news lately] **[OPEN END. RECORD FIRST MENTION ONLY]**

38	Anna Nicole Smith
28	George W. Bush
3	Barack Obama
3	Hillary Clinton
1	Britney Spears
1	Nancy Pelosi
9	Other
17	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.1   As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE ITEMS, ALWAYS INCLUDING a. AND b. AS A BLOCK IN ORDER]** **[IF NECESSARY** "Did you follow **[ITEM]** very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?"]

		Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	DK/ Refused
a.	News about the current situation in Iraq	**30**	**36**	**19**	**14**	**1=100**
	Feb 9-12, 2007	**37**	**34**	**18**	**11**	***=100**
	Feb 2-5, 2007	**38**	**38**	**17**	**7**	***=100**
	Jan 26-29, 2007	**36**	**38**	**15**	**11**	***=100**
	Jan 19-22, 2007	**37**	**34**	**18**	**10**	**1=100**
	Jan 12-15, 2007	**38**	**36**	**17**	**8**	**1=100**
	January, 2007	46	40	8	5	1=100
	Jan 5-8, 2007	**40**	**32**	**16**	**12**	**0=100**
	December, 2006	42	39	12	7	*=100
	Nov 30 – Dec 3, 2006	**40**	**36**	**13**	**11**	***=100**
	Mid-November, 2006	44	38	12	6	*=100
	September, 2006	33	43	14	8	2=100
	August, 2006	41	39	12	7	1=100
	June, 2006	37	43	13	6	1=100
	May, 2006	42	35	15	7	1=100
	April, 2006	43	36	13	7	1=100
	March, 2006	43	38	12	6	1=100
	February, 2006	39	42	12	6	1=100
	January, 2006	40	40	12	7	1=100
	December, 2005	45	38	11	5	1=100
	Early November, 2005	41	40	13	6	*=100
	Early October, 2005	43	36	15	6	*=100
	Early September, 2005	32	40	20	7	1=100
	July, 2005	43	37	13	6	1=100
	June, 2005	41	39	12	7	1=100
	Mid-May, 2005	42	42	11	5	*=100
	Mid-March, 2005	40	39	14	5	2=100
	February, 2005	38	45	13	4	*=100

Q.1 CONTINUED…

	Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	DK/ Refused
January, 2005	48	37	11	4	*=100
December, 2004	34	44	15	6	1=100
Mid-October, 2004	42	38	11	8	1=100
Early September, 2004	47	37	9	6	1=100
August, 2004	39	42	12	6	1=100
July, 2004	43	40	11	6	*=100
June, 2004	39	42	12	6	1=100
April, 2004	54	33	8	5	*=100
Mid-March, 2004	47	36	12	4	1=100
Early February, 2004	47	38	10	4	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	48	39	9	4	*=100
December, 2003	44	38	11	6	1=100
November, 2003	52	33	9	5	1=100
October, 2003	38	40	14	7	1=100
September, 2003	50	33	10	6	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	45	39	10	5	1=100
Early July, 2003	37	41	13	8	1=100
June, 2003	46	35	13	6	*=100
May, 2003	63	29	6	2	*=100
April 11-16, 2003[1]	47	40	10	2	1=100
April 2-7, 2003	54	34	9	2	1=100
March 20-24, 2003	57	33	7	2	1=100
March 13-16, 2003[2]	62	27	6	4	1=100
February, 2003	62	25	8	4	1=100
January, 2003	55	29	10	4	2=100
December, 2002	51	32	10	6	1=100
Late October, 2002	53	33	8	5	1=100
Early October, 2002	60	28	6	5	1=100
Early September, 2002	48	29	15	6	2=100

		Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	DK/ Refused
b.	Reports that Iran may be supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq	**28**	**32**	**20**	**19**	**1=100**
	Feb 2-5, 2007[3]	**33**	**38**	**18**	**10**	**1=100**
	TREND FOR COMPARISON:					
	August, 1988[4]	22	38	29	11	*=100
c.	The death of Anna Nicole Smith	**14**	**25**	**29**	**31**	**1=100**
	Feb 9-12, 2007	**11**	**27**	**31**	**30**	**1=100**
d.	Cold winter weather and snowstorms in the Northeast and Midwest	**30**	**33**	**18**	**18**	**1=100**
	Feb 9-12, 2007[5]	**36**	**36**	**15**	**13**	***=100**
	Jan 19-22, 2007	**31**	**32**	**22**	**14**	**1=100**

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[1] From March 20 to April 16, 2003 the story was listed as "News about the war in Iraq."

[2] From October, 2002 to March 13-16, 2003 the story was listed as "Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will take military action in Iraq." In Early September, 2002 the story was listed as "Debate over the possibility that the U.S. will invade Iraq."

[3] For February 2-5, 2007 the story was listed as "Mounting tensions between the United States and Iran."

[4] In August, 1988 the story was listed as "The cease fire in the war between Iran and Iraq."

[5] For February 9-12, 2007 the story was listed as "Cold winter weather." For January 19-22, 2007 the story was listed as "Snow and ice storms in some parts of the country." For January 5-8, 2007 the story was listed as "Winter snowstorms in the western U.S." In January 2001 the story was listed as "Cold winter weather and storms in the Northeast and Midwest." In January 1999 the story was listed as "Cold winter weather and storms in the Midwest." In December, 1998 the story was listed as "Unseasonable weather patterns." In January 1994 the story was listed as "News about cold weather conditions in the Northeast and Midwest."

Q.1 CONTINUED…

	Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	DK/ Refused
Jan 5-8, 2007	**24**	**30**	**25**	**21**	***=100**
January, 2001	42	31	15	11	1=100
January, 1999	37	34	17	12	*=100
Early December, 1998	39	35	13	12	1=100
January, 1994	51	30	12	7	*=100
e. News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election	**18**	**32**	**22**	**27**	**1=100**
Feb 9-12, 2007	**24**	**30**	**24**	**21**	**1=100**
Feb 2-5, 2007	**24**	**36**	**22**	**18**	***=100**
Jan 26-29, 2007	**24**	**33**	**23**	**20**	***=100**
Jan 19-22, 2007[6]	**24**	**27**	**22**	**26**	**1=100**
2004 Presidential Election[7]					
November, 2004 *(RVs)*	52	36	8	4	*=100
Mid-October, 2004	46	30	12	11	1=100
Early September, 2004	40	34	14	11	1=100
August, 2004	32	38	16	14	*=100
July, 2004	29	37	18	15	1=100
June, 2004	28	34	19	18	1=100
April, 2004	31	33	19	16	1=100
Mid-March, 2004	35	34	18	13	*=100
Late February, 2004	24	40	23	12	1=100
Early February, 2004	29	37	20	13	1=100
Mid-January, 2004	16	30	27	26	1=100
Early January, 2004	14	32	30	23	1=100
December, 2003	16	26	27	30	1=100
November, 2003	11	26	34	28	1=100
October, 2003	12	27	28	32	1=100
September, 2003	17	25	30	27	1=100
Mid-August, 2003	12	27	27	33	1=100
May, 2003	8	19	31	41	1=100
January, 2003	14	28	29	28	1=100
2000 Presidential Election					
Early November, 2000 *(RVs)*	39	44	12	5	*=100
Mid-October, 2000 *(RVs)*	40	37	15	8	8=100
Early October, 2000 *(RVs)*	42	36	15	6	1=100
September, 2000	22	42	21	15	*=100
July, 2000	21	38	20	20	1=100
June, 2000	23	32	23	21	1=100
May, 2000	18	33	26	23	*=100
April, 2000	18	39	22	20	1=100
March, 2000	26	41	19	13	1=100
February, 2000	26	36	21	17	*=100
January, 2000	19	34	28	18	1=100
December, 1999	16	36	24	23	1=100
October, 1999	17	32	28	22	1=100
September, 1999	15	31	33	20	1=100
July, 1999	15	38	24	22	1=100
June, 1999	11	25	29	34	1=100

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[6] January 19-22, 2007 asked about: "Recent announcements by prominent Democrats about plans to run for president in 2008."

[7] In previous election years, the question wording of stories varies due to factors such as timing within the election cycle (primaries or general election) and the nature of the race (incumbent candidate or open field of candidates).

8

Q.1 CONTINUED…

	Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	DK/ Refused
1996 Presidential Election					
November, 1996 *(RVs)*	34	45	15	6	*=100
October, 1996	31	39	18	12	*=100
Early September, 1996	24	36	23	17	*=100
July, 1996	22	40	23	14	1=100
April, 1996	23	35	25	17	*=100
March, 1996	26	41	20	13	*=100
January, 1996	10	34	31	24	1=100
September, 1995	12	36	30	22	*=100
August, 1995	13	34	28	25	*=100
June, 1995	11	31	31	26	1=100
1992 Presidential Election					
October, 1992 *(RVs)*	55	36	7	2	0=100
September, 1992 *(RVs)*	47	36	11	6	*=100
August, 1992 *(RVs)*	36	51	11	2	0=100
July, 1992	20	45	26	9	*=100
May, 1992	32	44	16	8	*=100
March, 1992	35	40	16	9	*=100
January, 1992	11	25	36	27	1=100
December, 1991	10	28	32	30	*=100
October, 1991	12	26	31	29	2=100
1988 Presidential Election					
October, 1988 *(RVs)*	43	44	11	2	*=100
August, 1988 *(RVs)*	39	45	13	3	*=100
May, 1988	22	46	23	6	3=100
November, 1987	15	28	35	21	1=100
September, 1987	14	34	37	14	1=100

	Very Closely	Fairly Closely	Not too closely	Not at all closely	DK/ Refused
f. Recent negotiations to shut down North Korea's nuclear weapons program	**15**	**31**	**22**	**31**	**1=100**
Late October, 2006[8]	45	33	13	8	1=100
February, 2005[9]	22	34	22	22	*=100
September, 2003	19	32	27	21	1=100
May, 2003	27	40	22	11	*=100
March, 2003	34	34	19	12	1=100
February, 2003	33	34	18	13	2=100
January, 2003	33	34	18	14	1=100
Late October, 2002	25	31	23	20	1=100
June, 1994	27	33	26	14	*=100

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[8] In October, 2006 the story was listed as "North Korea's announcement that it recently tested a nuclear weapon."

[9] From January, 2003 to February, 2005 the story was listed as, "North Korea's nuclear weapons program." In Late October 2002 the story was listed as "North Korea's admission that it has been secretly developing nuclear weapons." In June 1994 the story was listed as "Reports about North Korea's building of nuclear weapons and refusal to allow UN inspections."

Q.2   Which ONE of the stories I just mentioned have you followed most closely, or is there another story you've been following MORE closely? **[DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.]**

26   News about the current situation in Iraq
 6   Reports that Iran may be supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq
16   The death of Anna Nicole Smith
16   Cold winter weather and snowstorms in the Northeast and Midwest
 9   News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
 2   Recent negotiations to shut down North Korea's nuclear weapons program
 7   Some other story **(SPECIFY)**
<u>18</u>   Don't know/Refused
100

IF DON'T KNOW/REFUSED IN Q.2, SKIP Q.3 [N=840]:
Q.3   Of all the stories I just mentioned, are there any that you wish you had more time to follow? **[DO NOT READ; DISPLAY PRE-CODES; ACCEPT UP TO THREE RESPONSES BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR MORE THAN ONE]**

15   News about the current situation in Iraq
10   Reports that Iran may be supplying weapons to insurgents in Iraq
 3   The death of Anna Nicole Smith
 5   Cold winter weather and snowstorms in the Northeast and Midwest
12   News about candidates for the 2008 presidential election
 8   Recent negotiations to shut down North Korea's nuclear weapons program
62   None of these
 2   Don't know/Refused

Q.4   Where do you regularly go for news about national and international issues –television, newspapers, radio, magazines, or the internet? **[ACCEPT TWO ANSWERS: IF ONLY ONE RESPONSE IS GIVEN, PROBE ONCE FOR ADDITIONAL RESPONSE]**
IF '1' TELEVISION AS EITHER 1ST OR 2ND RESPONSE IN Q.4, ASK:
Q.5   On television, do you regularly get news about national and international issues from **[READ, RANDOMIZE ITEMS 2 THRU 4 AND 5 THRU 8 SEPARATELY, AND RANDOMIZE SETS OF ITEMS (NETWORK; CABLE; LOCAL). ACCEPT MULTIPLE ANSWERS BUT DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL**

77   Television
       18   Local news programming
       17   ABC Network news
       15   CBS Network news
       19   NBC Network news
       24   CNN Cable news
        7   MSNBC Cable news
       22   The Fox News Cable Channel
        5   CNBC Cable news
        3   Other **(VOL.)**
        3   Don't know/Refused **(VOL. DO NOT READ)**
43   Newspapers
19   Radio
 3   Magazines
32   Internet
 1   Other **(VOL. – SPECIFY)**
 2   Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**