

“If You Can’t See It, You Can’t Be It!” News Media Engagement and Gender Differences Among Irish Economists

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Abstract: Women are under-represented across most facets of economics. One under-investigated area of research is their participation in the media. The absence of female representation may contribute to the perception of economics as a largely male dominated discipline, with consequences for role modelling, influencing public debate, and ultimately policy decisions. Using an online self-reported survey, this study investigates levels of news media engagement among economists in Ireland and the supply-side factors influencing barriers to engaging with the media. We find that women economists are less likely to be invited to participate in news media events compared to their male counterparts. Women are also more likely to refuse to participate and require longer to prepare for an interview. While there are no gender differences regarding feeling equipped to deal with the media, women are less confident and more likely to state that media engagement is not an important part of their working lives. Despite this, women feel a greater responsibility to inform the public about the implications of their research, and to act as role models for junior economists. Our findings suggest that a multi-faceted approach is required to achieve greater gender equality – by economists themselves, who could build media networks and promote their research through different channels; by employers, who could give women economists more time to engage with the media; by journalists, who could better foster and build relationships with women economists; and by representative bodies, who could better communicate the depth and diversity of economists’ areas of expertise.

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I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Under-representation of Women Economists

Women are under-represented in multiple facets of economics from secondary school to higher education, and subsequently into their professional careers. In Ireland, women account for 41 per cent of academic economists and 32 per cent of full professors (Friebel and Wilhelm, 2020). Internationally, gender is the most consistent, significant predictor of students' decision to study economics, and the proportion of women in undergraduate economics majors has remained between 30-35 per cent for several decades (Siegfried, 2017). Rates of under-representation in Ireland are similar, and unlike some other disciplines, there has not been any improvement in representation over time (HEA, 2023). Despite women accounting for circa 50 per cent of Leaving Certificate students, the proportion taking economics is consistently around 35 per cent, with no improvement over the past decade (State Examinations Commission, 2022). This feeds into a similar pattern of under-representation at undergraduate level, with women accounting for 36 per cent of economics students in 2023 (HEA Statistics, 2023). The lower proportion of women with an economics degree has an impact on the private sector, where only 10-20 per cent of chief economists in banking and financial institutions are women (Hansbach *et al.*, 2021). This under-representation is more pronounced than in most other STEM fields and has significant consequences as women are missing future returns to a high-paying subject (Britton *et al.*, 2016). This issue also has wider societal implications. For example, there are significant differences in opinions between male and female economists across a range of topics (May, 2014) and ideological bias is estimated to be 44 per cent larger among male economists compared to their female counterparts (Javdani and Chang, 2023). Thus, increasing the representation of women in economics may improve policy design and implementation, potentially enhancing societal welfare.

1.2 Importance of Role Modelling

One potential factor influencing a female student's decision to study and stay in economics is the low visibility of female role models in the profession. The importance of role models as a mechanism to increase gender diversity in stereotypically male subjects is well established in the literature (e.g. Lockwood, 2006; Meier *et al.*, 2018). Role models are important as they can change how one views oneself, as well as the world in general, through social learning (Kearney and Levine, 2020). Female role models can also help to reduce stereotypes in the general population. Evidence suggests that long-term exposure to counter-stereotypical role models is positively correlated with individuals' aspirations towards those roles (Olsson and Martiny, 2018). Porter and Serra (2020) find that being visited by a successful female economics graduate significantly increases the probability of majoring in economics. Another important source of role models is

the news media. Indeed, such media exposure may be more impactful than once-off school visits as it occurs more frequently and earlier in the life cycle. Yet anecdotally, the voice of women economists is largely absent in both digital and print media, despite an increasing recognition of the role of public engagement and impact among higher education and research institutions.

1.3 Women as Experts in the Media

To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies, either internationally or in Ireland, that explore the prevalence of male and female economists in the news media or the supply-side factors influencing barriers to economists engaging with the media. More generally, some studies have documented that men are over-represented as ‘experts’ in the media (e.g. see Kitzinger *et al.* (2008) for the UK, Desmond and Danilewicz (2010) for the US, and Niemi and Pitkänen (2017) for Finland). A snapshot analysis of news stories from the UK and Ireland in 2020 found that although 40 per cent of academic expert news sources were women, news reporting on the economy had one of the lowest percentage of sources who were women at 26 per cent (Wheatley *et al.*, 2024). Earlier research from O’Brien and Suiter (2017) found that only 22 per cent of experts on Irish national radio programmes were women. In addition, in a review of experts appearing on two of the main Irish radio shows in late 2008 to explain the financial and banking crisis, 92 per cent of commentators were men (Rafter, 2014). This under-representation of women experts became even more salient during COVID-19 where decision-making, policy discourse, and commentary surrounding the pandemic was predominantly led by men. For example, Culloty and Kearns (2021) found a 60:40 gender divide on COVID-19 commentary on six of the main RTÉ radio and television shows. In addition, Jones (2020) analysed news articles related to COVID-19 in the US, UK, and Australia over a five-month period during the pandemic and found that only a third of those quoted were women, and only 15 per cent of prominent economists mentioned were female. Several studies have also found that when women feature in the media, their contributions are much more likely to be emotional and from the perspective of the private citizen in roles that reinforce gender stereotypes, such as victim, mother, homemaker, or caregiver, rather than as experts (Wheatley, 2020; Ross *et al.*, 2016). Previous research in both the UK (Howell and Singer, 2016) and Australia (Shine *et al.*, 2021) has identified a lack of confidence and time constraints as the main barriers to women experts engaging with news media.

1.4 Barriers to Women Economists Engaging with News Media

Within economics, some recent studies have explored gender differences in opinion expression in a non-media context. One study by Sievertsen and Smith (2022), using data from the Economist Expert Panel, finds that women are less likely to express an opinion, and less likely to express a strong opinion or have confidence

in their opinions, compared to male economists. However, another paper by Sievertsen and Smith (2024), using an experimental design, finds that when the public are exposed to the same opinions expressed by male and female economists, females' opinions are considered to be more persuasive. Therefore, while women are less likely to feature as experts in the news media and to publicly voice an opinion, when they do their opinions are more impactful.

These findings raise the question as to why women economists are less likely to engage with the public more generally, and specifically with the news media. One possible explanation is that female economists are treated differently than male economists. A number of studies have found that women economists are held to a higher standard and their credibility is more frequently questioned. For example, Dupas *et al.* (2021) find that female academics are asked more questions during seminars, and the questions are more likely to be patronising or hostile. In an analysis of reference letters, Eberhardt *et al.* (2023) find that women economists are more likely to be described using 'grindstone' terms, and less likely to be praised for their ability. Additionally, academic papers submitted by female authors spend six months longer under review compared to male authors, despite evidence that they are written to a higher standard (Hengel, 2022). Studies have shown higher citations for female-authored papers (Card *et al.*, 2020; Hengel and Moon, 2020), yet fewer citations in higher ranked journals (Koffi, 2021). This differential treatment is not only perpetuated by peers, but also by students, as women receive systematically lower teaching evaluations than male colleagues (Mengel *et al.*, 2019). As a result of experiencing such forms of discrimination in the workplace, female economists may be more reticent to engage with the news media, as by doing so, they are potentially putting themselves forward for public criticism and backlash.

Risk preferences may also play a role. While the evidence that women are inherently more risk averse than men is less conclusive than originally believed (Nelson, 2015), recent studies have demonstrated that women may take fewer risks as, due to expectations around gender social norms, they benefit less and are penalised more from risk taking (Morgenroth *et al.*, 2022). For example, there is evidence that female economists make less risky choices regarding academic collaborations and research projects (Ductor *et al.*, 2018). Appearances on live radio and television are inherently risky events due to uncertainties regarding the line of questioning. Thus, if women are more risk averse than men, they may be less likely to actively place themselves in such situations, especially when the topic of the interview is not closely aligned with their area of expertise. Indeed, Sarsons and Xu (2021) show that when answering questions directly related to their field of interest (in an expert survey), female economists are as confident as male economists, however, they are less confident when asked questions outside their field.

1.5 Importance of Women Representation in News Media

Ensuring greater female representation in the news media is important. As above, it may serve a role modelling purpose for those wishing to pursue a career in economics. In addition, greater visibility of women economists in the media may encourage other female economists to increase their level of media engagement. There is also qualitative evidence that engaging with the media can support career progression among academics (Niemi and Pitkänen, 2017; Wien, 2014). However, perhaps the most important reason is that media exposure confers power. Appearing in the news media as an expert may sway public debate with subsequent impacts on decision-making and policy outcomes (Niemi and Pitkänen, 2017). Indeed, Sievertsen and Smith (2024) find that expert economists' opinions can persuade or change the views of the public. In addition, May *et al.* (2014) note differences in the views of male and female economists. While both genders hold similar views regarding core economic concepts and methodology, women economists have a greater tendency to support government intervention while men tend to favour market based solutions. Women also demonstrate more support for increased environmental regulation, employer provided health insurance, and raising minimum wages (May *et al.*, 2014). Thus, if the views of male economists are more prominent in the media, it may influence public discourse on these issues, with consequences for policy decisions.

1.6 Study Aims

The aims of this study are threefold; to document the level of news media engagement among male and female economists in Ireland, to elicit the barriers to news media participation, and to identify potential solutions to increasing the voice and visibility of women economists. Increasing the proportion of females in the public domain may help to improve the perception of economics as a more open and diverse field, which in turn may increase trust in economists. In addition, documenting the challenges of news media engagement faced by female economists may prove useful for understanding the challenges in other disciplines where women are similarly under-represented. To this end, we conducted a survey of economists based in Ireland as part of the HEA Gender Equality Enhancement Grant provided to the Irish Society for Women in Economics (ISWE).¹ Note, the small sample size (n=43) and potential selection into the self-reported survey limits the conclusions we can make about the full landscape of economists' media engagement in Ireland.² However, in the absence of any other data on the topic, it

¹ ISWE is a voluntary network created by colleagues working in economics across Ireland to address the under-representation of women in the profession. Guided by the foundational principles of evidence-based impact, and collaboration and engagement, ISWE works to ensure that economists in public debate, policy decisions, education, and the private sector are more representative of Irish society.

² A similar scoping survey was conducted at the start of the HEA project and results from an analysis of this larger sample of economists (n=88) were very similar to the findings presented in this paper.

is an important initial step towards identifying and understanding the gender divide in news media engagement.

II METHODOLOGY

2.1 Survey

The online survey was distributed through the ISWE and Irish Economic Association (IEA) mailing lists, both Twitter/X accounts, and the ISWE LinkedIn page. The survey fieldwork period was from 7 March to 8 April 2024. The final sample size included 43 responses. Within the survey, ‘news media’ was defined broadly as participating in radio or television interviews, writing newspaper articles, or having your research feature in newspaper articles. We also asked about social media engagement (Twitter/X, LinkedIn, YouTube) including blog posts and podcasts. The survey also included questions about the types and frequency of prior news media engagement, channels through which media engagement arose, reasons for not engaging with media, attitudes towards media engagement, willingness to participate in the media, preparation time required for media engagement, and factors that would encourage greater media engagement.

2.2 Sample Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographics of the survey respondents (n=43). The majority of the sample are women (63 per cent); however there is good representation of male economists in the sample (35 per cent). Over half (54 per cent) work in a higher education institution, 44 per cent work in a public sector organisation, and 2 per cent in the private sector. The majority (86 per cent) have a permanent position. Most respondents completed their highest educational qualification 11-20 years ago, closely followed by those who finished 0-5 years ago. Thus, the sample is representative of all career stages. The demographic distribution of the sample is similar for male and female economists, with some small differences. There are no female private sector respondents, and there is a higher proportion of males who completed their highest level of education more than 20 years ago.

III RESULTS

3.1 Prior Participation in Media Engagement Activities

Within the sample, opportunities to engage with the media are frequent, and there is a high level of collegiality within the profession regarding recommending colleagues to participate in media events. Most respondents (71 per cent) have been invited by a journalist or producer to participate in a media engagement activity sometime in the past. Men are slightly more likely than women to have ever been

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Employment type</i>			
Higher education institution	54%	60%	52%
Public sector organisation	44%	33%	48%
Private sector organisation	2%	7%	0%
<i>Other</i>			
<i>Contract type</i>			
Permanent	86%	87%	85%
Temporary	14%	13%	15%
<i>Years since highest educ. completed</i>			
0-5 years	30%	33%	30%
6-10 years	16%	7%	16%
11-20 years	35%	33%	35%
20+ years	19%	27%	19%
N	43	16	27

Source: Authors' analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

invited to participate in a media event (73 per cent vs 70 per cent). Most respondents (60 per cent) report that they have been recommended or invited by a colleague to participate in a media activity, with no difference between men and women. However, a higher proportion of women (67 per cent) report that they have been sent a direct media request received by a colleague or other economist than men (53 per cent). Women report being referred/sent requests by male colleagues (33 per cent), female colleagues (44 per cent), and the ISWE³ (17 per cent). Men are much more likely to be sent requests by male colleagues (75 per cent) than female colleagues (25 per cent).

Respondents were asked about the number of times they had been personally invited to participate in media engagement activities (e.g. radio interviews, newspaper articles, TV appearances, etc.) and how many times they had actually participated in the past year. They were also asked how many times they had ever been interviewed on radio, been interviewed on television, written an article for a newspaper or news website, been interviewed by a newspaper journalist, or had their research featured in a newspaper article. The mean responses by gender are presented in Table 2.

³ Note, one of the goals of ISWE is to increase the voice and visibility of women economists in Ireland. As part of this, they have a ISWE Media WhatsApp group which serves as a channel between news agencies and women economists.

Table 2: Media Engagement Differences by Gender

	<i>Invited</i> ¹	<i>Partook</i> ²	<i>Radio</i> ³	<i>TV</i> ⁴	<i>Written Article</i> ⁵	<i>Inter-viewed for Article</i> ⁶	<i>Research in Article</i> ⁷
Female	1.89 (2.19)	1.07 (0.33)	3.07 (1.06)	0.82 (0.55)	1.78 (0.55)	2.00 (0.72)	4.56 (1.24)
Male	4.87 (6.81)	3.87 (1.52)	8.47 (2.47)	5.67 (1.67)	5.33 (1.79)	7.93 (2.31)	10.07 (2.12)
Difference	-2.98* (1.81)	-2.79** (1.56)	-5.39** (2.69)	-4.85*** (1.76)	-3.55** (1.87)	-5.93** (2.42)	-5.51** (2.46)

Source: Authors' analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Note: Standard errors presented in parentheses. *p <0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. Differences in bold indicate a Mann-Whitney U Test result of p<0.10.

¹ "In the last year, how many times have you been given the opportunity or personally invited to participate in media engagement activities?"

² "In the last year, how many times have you taken part in media engagement activities?"
"How many times have you ever done any of the following media engagement activities?"

³ Been interviewed on radio;

⁴ Been interviewed on TV;

⁵ Written an article for a newspaper or news website;

⁶ Been interviewed by a newspaper journalist

⁷ Had your research featured in a newspaper article".

Table 2 demonstrates that, over the past year, women economists were invited to participate in media engagement activities less often than their male counterparts and participated in fewer media engagement activities. On average, male economists were invited to participate in five activities and participated in almost four in the last year. In comparison, women on average received just under two invitations and participated in one media engagement activity. Over the full span of their careers, these lower participation rates result in substantial difference in media appearances between the women and men economists in our sample. This is evident by looking at the number of times respondents have ever participated in different types of media engagement activities. On average, women have been interviewed on television and radio much less often, they have written fewer newspaper articles, been interviewed by print journalists much less often, and have had their research featured in articles fewer times than men. All these differences are statistically significant when we use a two sample unequal variance t-test to

compare the means. However, given the small sample size, the data may not be normally distributed. Therefore as a robustness check, we also test if there is a difference in the central tendency of the underlying distributions of the two genders using the Mann-Whitney U Test. The gender differences in participation rates overall, the number of interviews on television and by newspaper journalists, and the number of times their research has featured in a newspaper article are all robust to this alternative approach.

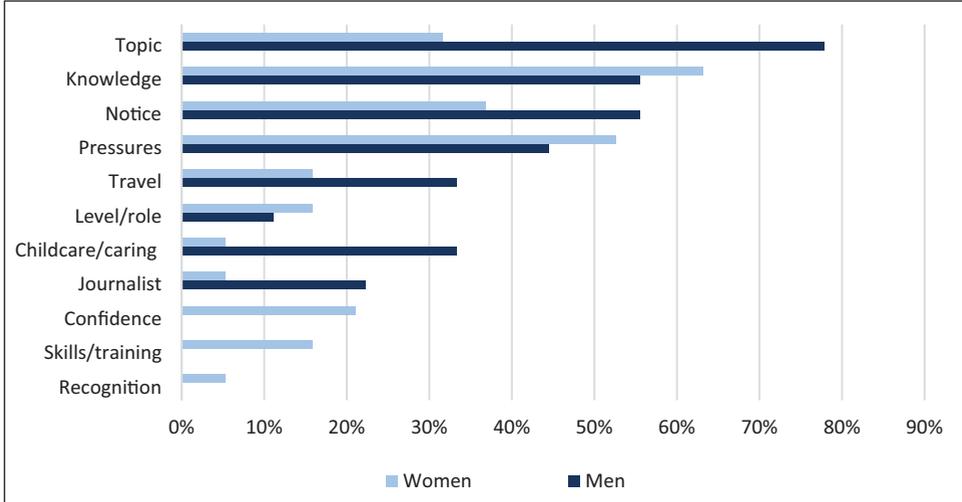
3.2 Refusing Requests to Participate in Media Engagement Activities

If women are asked to participate in media activities less often than men, this may explain their overall lower participation rate, however it is also possible that women are more likely to refuse a request to participate. Therefore within the survey we investigated differences in refusal rates. We find that a lower proportion of men report having ever refused to participate in a media engagement activity (60 per cent vs 70 per cent, p -value=0.26), although this difference is not statistically significant. Of those who report ever having refused, men have refused more requests than women. The mode number of refusals for women is between three and five times; 73 per cent of women who have ever refused a media request report they have done so between three and five times. For men, the mode number of refusals is more than ten times, with 55 per cent reporting more than ten refusals. Possibly, men refuse more requests as they are more frequently asked to engage with the media compared to women. This allows them to be more selective regarding both the outlets and topics they choose to engage with, possibly selecting more prestigious media outlets or topics that best match their areas of expertise or interest.

To elicit the potential barriers to media engagement, respondents were asked to select from a list their reasons for refusing media requests. Figure 1 summarises the responses to this question and presents differences by gender. Respondents, on average, listed three reasons for declining invitations to engage with the media, with no difference in the average number of reasons given across genders. The most common reason for men was not wanting to engage with the topic, followed by not having enough knowledge of the topic, and not being given enough notice to prepare for the interview. For women, the most common reason for refusing a request was not having enough knowledge of the topic, followed by too many competing pressures on their time. Interestingly, lacking confidence to engage with the media, lack of recognition of the value of media engagement, lack of skills/training, and childcare/caring responsibilities were cited only by a small number of respondents as barriers to media engagement. Although the sample sizes are very small, it is worth noting that while four women cited lack of confidence as a reason for refusing a media request, no men gave this reason. Additionally, three women refused a media request because they did not have the right skills or training, but no men listed this as a reason for refusing an invitation. Conversely, three men

reported that childcare or caring responsibilities caused them to refuse a media request while only one woman cited this reason.

Figure 1: Reasons for Declining Media Requests



Source: Authors’ analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Note: The bars show for respondents who had previously declined a media request, the percentage by gender who ticked the reason in response to the question “What were your reasons for refusing one or more direct media requests? Click all that apply”.

3.3 Preparation Time to Participate in Media Engagement Activities

Another potential barrier to engaging with the media is the time required to prepare for an engagement activity. Respondents were asked how much time they would need to prepare for an interview or media engagement activity about their own research, and on a topic outside their area of expertise. The mean number of hours required to prepare are presented in columns 1 and 2 in Table 3. Both within and outside of their area of expertise, women require one day longer to prepare than men. Women require about 2.5 days to prepare to speak about their own field, while men require about 1.5 days. This difference in preparation time is statistically significant for a news media activity related to their own research.⁴ For engaging on a topic outside of their area of expertise, the difference is not statistically significant as the sample size is smaller; 26 per cent of respondents would not engage at all on a topic outside of their expertise, with no significant differences between genders.

⁴ However the results of a Mann-Whitney U test suggest no differences in the central tendency of the underlying distributions by gender.

Interestingly, although women report requiring longer on average than men to prepare for media engagements, they do not feel less well equipped. Columns 3 and 4 of Table 3 present the average responses of respondents by gender to the question ‘how well equipped do you feel you are able to engage with the media’ both about their area of expertise and outside their area of expertise. The answers were recorded on a scale from 1 ‘Not at all equipped’ to 4 ‘Very well equipped’. Respondents, on average, feel well equipped to engage with the media about their area of expertise, but much less so about areas outside their own expertise. Women are slightly less confident than men in their ability to discuss topics outside their areas of expertise, but this difference is not statistically significant. Men and women feel equally well equipped when it comes to talking about their own research.

Table 3: Preparation Time and Confidence Differences by Gender

	<i>Prep time – Own Research (hrs) ¹</i>	<i>Prep time – Outside Expertise (hrs) ²</i>	<i>Feel equipped – Own Expertise ³</i>	<i>Feel equipped – Outside Expertise ⁴</i>
Female	59.57 (11.88)	99.57 (12.59)	2.81 (0.10)	1.56 (0.15)
Male	34.5 (11.25)	75.45 (22.38)	2.73 (0.12)	1.79 (0.24)
Difference	25.07* (16.35)	24.12 (25.68)	0.07 (0.15)	-0.23 (0.28)

Source: Authors’ analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Note: Standard errors presented in parentheses. *p < 0.10, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

- ¹ “If you were to engage with the media about your own research, how much notice would you need before an interview or media engagement activity to prepare?”
- ² “If you were to engage with the media on a topic outside your expertise, how much notice would you need before an interview or media engagement activity to prepare?”
- ³ “How well equipped do you feel you are to engage with the media about your area of expertise?” Four-point scale from ‘Very well equipped’ to ‘Not at all equipped’.
- ⁴ “How well equipped do you feel you are able to engage with the media about areas outside your expertise?” Four-point scale from ‘Very well equipped’ to ‘Not at all equipped’.

3.4 Self-promotion and Public Engagement

An increasingly important dimension to public engagement includes non-traditional media. Respondents were asked how often they engaged with the public about their own research and general economic topics through a number of different channels; social media, blog posts, podcasts, and invited public lectures, panel discussions, or other events. The responses by gender are summarised in Table 4. For the purposes of analysis, answers were categorised as ‘Often’ if reported engagement

was weekly or monthly, ‘Sometimes’ if reported engagement was quarterly or biannually, and ‘Rarely’ if engagement was annually or less often.

Overall, relatively high proportions of both male and female economists do not participate in public engagement activities, particularly blog posts or podcasts. However, the majority of the sample engage with social media either often or sometimes (>60 per cent). Patterns of engagement on social media are similar across genders, however differences emerge in the other forms of public engagement. Men are much more likely to write blog posts than women. Over half of the men in the sample use this medium while only 22 per cent of the women have ever written a blog post. Male economists are also more likely to be invited to participate in panel discussions or public facing events; 54 per cent report that they do so often or sometimes, in comparison to 63 per cent of women who report they rarely or never participate in these events. There is suggestive evidence that women are slightly more likely to take part in podcasts, with 44 per cent reporting that they have participated in one previously compared to 40 per cent of men.⁵

Table 4: Other Public Engagement Activities by Gender

		<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
Social media	Men	33%	33%	7%	27%
	Women	26%	37%	7%	30%
Blog Posts	Men	7%	13%	33%	47%
	Women	4%	7%	11%	78%
Podcasts	Men	0%	13%	27%	60%
	Women	4%	7%	33%	56%
Invited Events	Men	7%	47%	33%	13%
	Women	7%	30%	41%	22%

Source: Authors’ analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Note: “How often do you engage with the public about your research or general economic topics through each of these channels? – social media; blog posts; podcasts; invited public lectures, panel discussions or events.”

3.5 Motivations and Benefits to Engaging with the Media

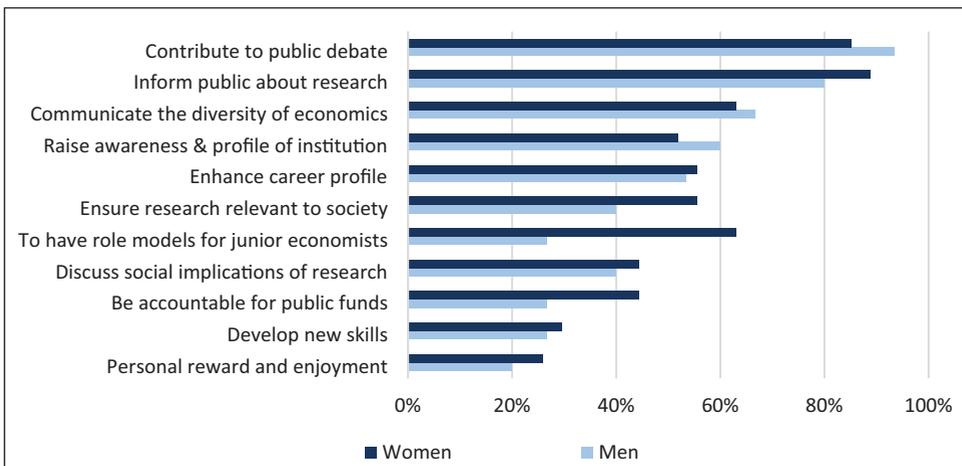
Economists are only going to engage with the media if the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs. Thus, the survey included a number of questions to elicit attitudes towards media engagement. In relation to other activities that respondents do in their working life, 62 per cent reported that engaging with the media was at least somewhat important. Women, however, were more likely than men to say that

⁵ Note that ISWE has a series of five podcasts in collaboration with ‘At the Margin’ profiling women economists, and also collaborated in ‘The Power Project’ with University College Cork (UCC) for which students interviewed women economists and five podcasts were released. It is therefore likely that some respondents to our survey may have been involved in these ISWE podcasts.

media engagement was not an important part of their working lives (48 per cent vs 20 per cent, p -value= 0.07).

Respondents were asked to select, from a list, the main benefits, if any, of engaging with the media. Figure 2 summarises the benefits listed by gender. The most common perceived benefit from media engagement is the opportunity to contribute to public debate, followed closely by the opportunity to inform the public and raise awareness about their research. On average, respondents listed six benefits to media engagement, with no statistically significant gender difference in the number of perceived benefits listed. For most of the benefits listed, similar proportions of women and men selected them. Fewer men reported that being accountable for public funds was a benefit of media engagement (27 per cent vs 44 per cent, p -value=0.28), although this difference is not statistically significant. The majority of women (63 per cent) believe that a benefit of media engagement is acting as a role model for junior economists and to address the leaky pipeline. In comparison, only 27 per cent of men consider this to be a benefit. This difference is statistically significant (p -value=0.025). Very few respondents, of either gender, engage with the media for personal reward and enjoyment.

Figure 2: Perceived Benefits of Engaging with the Media



Source: Authors' analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Note: The bars show the percentage of respondents by gender who ticked that benefit in answer to the question "What do you think are the main benefits, if any, of engaging with the media?".

Another potential motivation for engaging with the media is a belief that economists are morally or otherwise obligated to publicise their work and comment on current affairs. To determine if respondents held this belief, we measured, on a scale of

1 to 5 where 1 denotes 'strongly disagree' and 5 denotes 'strongly agree', how much they agree with the following statements:

1. Economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about the implications of their work/research;
2. Economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about current affairs;

Additionally, to capture the extent to which they believe that gender equality in the media is important and strengthens public debate, respondents were asked how much they agree with a further two statements:

3. Gender quotas (i.e. ensuring equal proportions of men/women are represented) in the media are a good approach to increasing female engagement with the media;
4. Ensuring that equal proportions of men/women are represented in the media enhances public debate.

The mean responses by gender for each statement are presented in Table 5. The majority of respondents (64 per cent) strongly agree that economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about the implications of their own research. Interestingly, women economists, on average, agree with the statement more strongly than men, indicating that they feel a greater responsibility to communicate their research findings to the public. This difference is statistically significant. There is a lower average level of agreement that economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about current affairs, with no statistically significant differences in average agreement levels across genders. Despite high levels of agreement on average that gender equality of representation in the media enhances public debate, there are lower levels of support for using gender quotas to increase the representation of women in the media. There are no statistically significant differences by gender across these responses.

Focusing on average responses may disguise some of the variation in the distribution of responses between men and women. For example, although there is no difference in average levels of agreement that economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about current affairs, Figures 3a and 3b illustrate the differences in the distributions of responses for men and women. A much higher proportion of men agree or strongly agree that economists have a responsibility to comment on current affairs than women, who are more likely to be neutral or disagree. This suggests that male economists feel more strongly that they should engage with the media on current affairs, giving some insight into the higher participation rates in the media.

Table 5: General Statements, Mean Agreement by Gender

	<i>Responsibility to engage – Research</i> ¹	<i>Responsibility to engage – Current Affairs</i> ²	<i>Gender Quotas</i> ³	<i>Equality Enhances public debate</i> ⁴
Female	4.63 (0.14)	3.85 (0.21)	4.04 (0.23)	4.41 (0.19)
Male	4.07 (0.27)	3.60 (0.34)	3.57 (0.34)	4.40 (0.29)
Difference	0.56** (0.30)	0.25 (0.39)	0.56 (0.48)	0.01 (0.34)

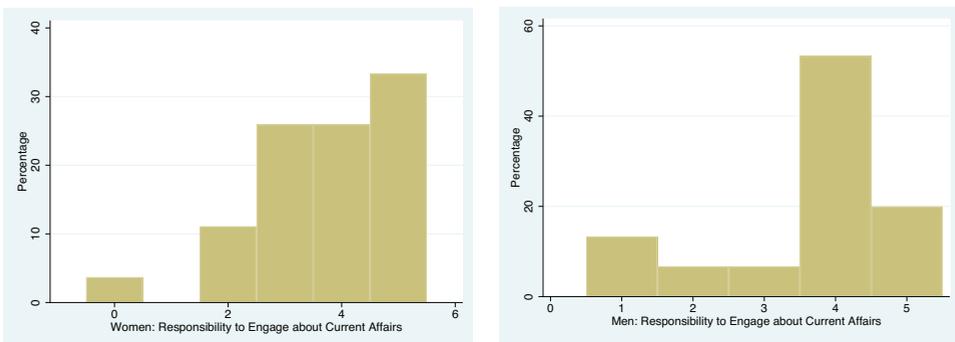
Source: Authors’ analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Note: Standard errors presented in parentheses. *p <0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01. Differences in bold indicate a Mann-Whitney U Test result of p<0.10.

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements:

- ¹ Economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about the implications of their work/research.
- ² Economists have a responsibility to engage with the public about current affairs.
- ³ Gender quotas in the media are a good approach to increasing female engagement with the media.
- ⁴ Ensuring that equal proportions of men and women are represented in the media enhances public debate.

Figures 3a and 3b: Responsibility to Engage with the Media about Current Affairs (LHS, Women; RHS, Men)



Source: Authors’ analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Respondents were also asked, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), how much they agreed with three statements on the societal impact of their own research, the personal benefit to them from engaging with the media, and their

own assessment of their skills to do so. Specifically, we measured their level of agreement regarding the statements:

1. My work/research has implications for society;
2. There are no personal benefits for me to engage with the media;
3. I feel confident in my media engagement skills.

The mean responses by gender for each statement are presented in Table 6. Almost all respondents (98 per cent) agree that their work has implications for society, and there are no differences in agreement levels between men and women. On average, economists disagree (72 per cent) that there are no personal benefits to media engagement. There is suggestive evidence that, on average, men perceive more personal benefits to media engagement than women, but this difference is not statistically significant. Moreover, women are more likely to agree that there are no personal benefits than men (33 per cent vs 14 per cent). Women economists are significantly less confident in their media engagement skills than their male counterparts. On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) that they are confident in their media skills, the average response for women was 2.81, just below neither agree nor disagree. The average score for men was almost 1 point higher. This difference is statistically significant. Breaking down this difference into average responses, only 40 per cent of women agree with the statement compared to a majority (53 per cent) of men.

Table 6: Personal Statements, Mean Agreement by Gender

	<i>Societal Implications</i> ¹	<i>No Benefits</i> ²	<i>Confidence</i> ³
Female	4.67 (0.09)	2.78 (0.26)	2.81 (0.26)
Male	4.67 (0.16)	2.33 (0.27)	3.53 (0.35)
Difference	0.00 (0.18)	0.44 (0.38)	0.72* (0.43)

Source: Authors' analysis based on results of the ISWE media survey.

Note: Standard errors presented in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Differences in confidence have a Mann-Whitney U Test p -value = 0.10.

Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements: [Scale from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree]

¹ My work/research has implications for society.

² There are no personal benefits for me to engage with the media.

³ I feel confident in my media engagement skills.

3.6 Media Training and Engagement with ISWE

We also asked respondents about their engagement with ISWE, and if they had previously participated in media or communications training. As shown above, few of the respondents cited lack of skills or training as a barrier to media engagement, and this is perhaps because the majority of respondents (74 per cent) have previously received formal media or communications training. More men than women have availed of training (80 per cent vs 70 per cent, p -value=0.25), although this difference is not statistically significant. Of those who received media training, almost half (48 per cent) received it in-house, provided by their HR or professional development department. A third of the women in the sample had participated in ISWE media training.

Lastly, we asked respondents if they had ever attended an ISWE event, and perhaps unsurprisingly given the survey was circulated via the ISWE mailing list and social media, 83 per cent of respondents had been to at least one event. Women attended an average of 2.5 events compared to men who had previously attended one event on average. This difference is statistically significant (p -value= 0.00).

IV DISCUSSION

Women are under-represented at all levels in the discipline of economics in Ireland. Lower proportions of women studying economics at school and third level results in relatively fewer women in the profession. There is also evidence that women experts are under-represented in the Irish media (Wheatley et. al., 2024; O'Brien and Suiter, 2017), and given the smaller pool of women economists, they are even less visible in the media than their male counterparts. To date however, there has been no research on gender differences in economists' media engagement in an Irish context, or to the best of our knowledge, internationally. This study provides important insights into this under-researched topic, allowing us to investigate potential gender differences in media requests and participation rates, uncover barriers to engagement, and identify potential strategies to increase the representation of women economists in the Irish news media.

As a small country, the opportunities to engage with the media in Ireland are frequent, as demonstrated by the high proportion of the sample (71 per cent) that have previously been invited to participate. Interestingly, there are no gender differences regarding having ever been invited to take part in a media event. However, when asked about media invitations and engagement over the past year, there are considerable differences between men and women economists. Men on average have received three more invitations than women (five vs two) and subsequently participated in three more activities (four vs one). This translates into sizable differences between men and women in the number of appearances on television and radio programmes over the course of their careers. On average, men

have appeared on both mediums five more times, totalling ten more interviews than women. Thus, although at the extensive margin, women appear to be invited as often as men, at the intensive margin there are significant differences in the frequency of invitations and appearances. A possible explanation for this difference is that women are more likely to refuse first approaches from the media, and anecdotal evidence suggests that once the first invitation is refused, they are less likely to be asked a second time. Given the small pool of media agencies in Ireland, it is relatively easy for economists to develop links with journalists and producers, thus, once relationships are established, the same set of economists are likely to be invited and therefore participate in the media time and again.

We find that women are also less likely to write articles, be interviewed by a print journalist, or have their research featured in a newspaper; on average they have written 3.5 fewer newspaper articles, been interviewed for an article six fewer times, and been featured 5.5 fewer times than men. This finding is consistent with evidence from numerous studies that women are less likely to engage in self-promotion than men (e.g. Exley and Kessler, 2022). This lower engagement rate in print media may also explain the gender differences in radio and television appearances. Journalists often source experts for these programmes through print media. Thus, if women feature less often in these outlets, they are less likely to be invited onto other media. Other avenues for promoting research are through social media, blog posts, podcasts, and public engagement events. These are also outlets through which journalists source potential contributors. While not statistically significant, women are less likely than men in the sample to frequently engage in social media and blogging. Thus, this may also contribute to the lower level of media engagement invitations for women. However, similar to writing an article for a newspaper, these are outlets where engagement is initiated by the individual rather than the media agency, and the agenda is driven by the researcher rather than the journalist, thus they offer less risky ways to engage with the media. As described above, women tend to be more risk averse than men (Morgenroth *et al.*, 2022), therefore posting on social media or writing a blog post/newspaper article can be a low risk first step towards news media engagement, particularly among those who feel less confident with less controlled engagement activities.

These less pressurised engagement activities are important, as consistent with other research (e.g. Sievertsen and Smith, 2022), we find that women are less confident than men in their media engagement skills. Participating in outlets where the researcher has more control can help build confidence and improve communication skills. In addition, while we find no differences in how well equipped women feel about engaging with the media, they do require significantly longer to prepare for a media appearance. On average, men require 1.5 days and women 2.5 days to prepare to talk about their own research, with both genders requiring significantly longer to talk about areas outside their expertise (men >3 days vs women >4 days). For both genders, these 'ideal' preparation

periods are much longer than is usually available as journalists and producers operate on much shorter timescales, with less than 24 hours' notice being the norm. Thus, as women require longer preparation time to feel comfortable for an interview, this may also contribute to their lower participation rates. It is unlikely that media outlets will provide more notice time moving forward, therefore specific training in how to succinctly prepare for a media appearance may be warranted.

In terms of the other barriers to news media engagement, there are some similarities and differences between genders. One of the most cited reasons by both male and female economists is a lack of knowledge on the topic that they are being asked to comment on. A higher proportion of women cited a lack of knowledge, and it was the most common reason for women declining media requests. Both genders also stated that they had declined requests because they did not want to engage with a particular topic, but men were much more likely to state this as their reason and it was the most frequently cited barrier to engagement for men. Thus, for both genders, there appears to be a mismatch between what the media want economists to talk about and what economists feel knowledgeable to speak on. This suggests there is a need for better communicating and publicising the breadth of research undertaken by economists. Based on requests that are submitted to the ISWE WhatsApp group, most media requests relate to macroeconomic topics (inflation, interest rates etc.). As demonstrated by Chari and Goldsmith-Pinkham (2017), women are most under-represented in macroeconomics and finance, and more likely to conduct research on microeconomic topics. The under-representation of women is therefore even more stark within macroeconomics than in the discipline more broadly. While topics related to microeconomics (e.g. health, labour, children) do feature in the media, they are less likely to be presented as breaking news topics, and thus less likely to feature in high profile news programmes. However, among economists who wish to engage with the media on more applied or microeconomic topics, there is the potential to approach and establish relationships with media agencies to become regular 'expert' contributors on their topics of interest.

A higher proportion of women respondents noted competing time pressures as a reason for declining media requests, the second most common reason cited by women. This suggests there could be a role for heads of schools and faculties in universities to reduce the competing time pressures barrier for women economists. Research has shown that although there are no gender differences in hours worked, women in academia tend to spend more time on teaching and service activities than men, who spend more time on research (e.g. Allen et. al., 2023). Universities increasingly value staff media engagement as a mechanism for brand building and attracting students. The media also increasingly values diverse opinions, and requests for women economists are frequently received by the ISWE executive committee. However, it is often difficult to find female economists with expertise in a particular area who have the time to participate on short notice. Ensuring a

more equal allocation of teaching and service activities across genders in universities could facilitate women to engage more with the media.

Another important factor is the time pressure on journalists to find an expert to provide analysis given a fast-moving news cycle. Research in the UK found that women experts often need to be persuaded to go on air and take longer than men to agree; under time constraints, broadcasters often need someone who will quickly say yes. This means they are more likely to turn to personal contacts to fill their airtime (Howell and Singer, 2016). Therefore, there is a role for journalists and producers to build relationships with women economists by using slow news times to expand their networks in order to increase gender diversity in news media.

However, this must be prefaced by a willingness or desire to engage with the news media at the individual level. The results presented in this study suggest that female economists actually feel more responsibility to communicate their research to the public than their male counterparts. Despite this, women report that engaging with the media is a less important part of their work, and that they derive fewer benefits from doing so than men (although the latter difference is not statistically significant). This aligns with research suggesting that women derive fewer benefits from taking risks than men (Morgenroth *et al.*, 2022). One of the main cited benefits from engaging with the media for women is to serve as a role model for junior economists and to help address the leaky pipeline (63 per cent), while this benefit was much less important for male economists (27 per cent). Thus, female economists do feel a responsibility to engage with the media, but may lack the capacity to do so. Women more frequently cited competing time pressures as one of the barriers affecting their ability to engage with the media, they reported lower confidence levels than men, and may have fewer opportunities to engage in topics of interest or related to their research. As the majority of the sample have participated in some form of media or communications training in the past, this suggests that training in and of itself is not enough to increase female representation in the media. If more time is required to build relationships with, and participate in, the media, this means there is less time for other work related activities. As outlined above, higher education and research institutions are increasingly focused on making an impact; thus time and space should be provided to facilitate this work.

As above, we acknowledge the limitations of the relatively small sample size, and the potential selected nature of the sample. The survey is not a representative sample of economists in Ireland. The method of survey distribution means that only members of the Irish Economic Association (IEA) or those on the ISWE mailing list received a direct request to participate. While most Irish higher education institutions, research institutes, and public bodies with a large share of economists are IEA members, the list is not exhaustive, and in particular, did not include private sector organisations at the time of survey distribution. Thus on the one hand, the results may under-estimate the level of news media engagement of Irish economists. On the other hand, the majority of respondents are based in higher education

institutions where academic freedom ensures their opportunities to engage with the media are not restricted. Additionally, as the survey was advertised on IEA and ISWE socials, the majority of respondents are active on social media and are therefore more likely to have a public profile and be approached by the media. Economists interested in media engagement may also have been more likely to select into completing the survey. Consequently, the results may be an over-estimation of economists' engagement with the media. Despite these limitations, this study is an important initial first step in addressing the lack of evidence on gender differences in media engagement. However, caution should be taken in interpretation of the results.

In sum, in order to increase gender diversity in the news media within our discipline, action is required by economists themselves (to publicise their work through multiple channels and to build relationships with the media), by employers (to provide time for media engagement activities), by journalists (to take the time to find and build relationships with women economists), and by representative bodies such as the IEA and ISWE (to publicise the diversity of topics on which economists can speak). These strategies can increase the visibility of women in economics, providing role models, enhancing public debate, and increasing the representation of women at all levels. They also provide a template that can be used by other disciplines seeking to promote the role of women as experts in the media. As the title of this paper suggests 'if you can't see it, you can't be it', increasing the visibility of women in the media is one step towards mending the leaky pipeline.

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