A Study On The Impact Of Multi-Platform Image Construction By Television News Anchors In The Era Of Media Convergence On Audience Identification

Xuejiao Bai
Department of Arts, International College, Kirk University, Bangkok, Thailand, 10220, 614376236@qq.com, https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4452-3017

Abstract

Background and Aim: *Media convergence has enabled television news anchors to engage audiences across multiple digital platforms, a practice known as multi-platform image construction (MPIC). Drawing on Social Identity Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study examines how anchors' MPIC influences audience identification (AI). We propose a moderated mediation model in which perceived credibility (PC) mediates the effect of MPIC on AI, and audience media literacy (AML) moderates this process. The aim is to clarify the psychological mechanisms linking multi-platform persona construction by news anchors to audience identification in the digital era.*

Materials and Methods: *A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 657 television news viewers in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, China, from March to April 2025. Participants reported their perceptions of anchors' MPIC, PC, AI, and their own AML using validated Likert-scale questionnaires. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to test direct and mediated effects of MPIC on identification. In addition, Hayes's PROCESS macro (Model 7) was used to assess the proposed moderated mediation model, with bootstrap confidence intervals (5,000 resamples) to evaluate the conditional indirect effects.*

Results: *The findings supported the proposed model. MPIC had a significant positive effect on audience identification (p < 0.001). This relationship was partially mediated by perceived credibility: anchors who cultivated a consistent and authentic multi-platform presence were viewed as more credible, which in turn enhanced viewers' identification with them. Furthermore, audience media literacy significantly moderated the process. The positive impact of MPIC on identification (both the direct effect and the indirect effect via credibility) was stronger among viewers with higher media literacy. The moderated mediation analysis confirmed that higher-AML audiences derive greater identification benefits from anchors' multi-platform image construction efforts.*

Conclusion: *Effective multi-platform image construction by television news anchors can substantially strengthen audience identification, especially when audiences perceive the anchor as credible. Credibility emerged as a key mechanism through which MPIC fosters identification, and this effect is amplified for media-literate viewers. These results underscore that audience identification in the convergence era is co-shaped by anchors' cross-platform image strategies and audiences' cognitive engagement. The study extends Social Identity and Parasocial Interaction theories into multi-platform contexts, and highlights the importance of audience media literacy in moderating media effects. Practically, the findings suggest that news anchors should maintain a transparent, authentic persona across platforms, and that enhancing public media literacy can further reinforce audience–anchor connections in digital news environments.*

Keywords: *Multi-platform image construction; audience identification; perceived credibility; audience media literacy; Social Identity Theory; Parasocial Interaction; Elaboration Likelihood Model; moderated mediation; structural equation modeling.*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of media convergence, the boundaries between traditional broadcasting and digital platforms are rapidly dissolving, reshaping how television news anchors construct and communicate their professional personas. No longer confined to the studio, anchors now extend their presence across multiple digital spaces—including social media, mobile apps, and interactive video platforms—where they actively engage audiences

beyond the televised news hour. This transformation has led to the emergence of multi-platform image construction (MPIC), a communicative practice wherein anchors strategically present themselves to maintain credibility, relatability, and authority across divergent media channels. As audience habits evolve toward fragmented, personalized, and participatory news consumption, the coherence and effectiveness of an anchor's image across platforms has become critical to sustaining audience attention and loyalty (van Dijck & Poell, 2013; Chadwick, 2013).

Amidst this shifting landscape, audience identification with news anchors plays an increasingly pivotal role in shaping media trust, affective engagement, and news diffusion. Audience identification—a cognitive-affective process whereby viewers perceive symbolic affinity or emotional resonance with media figures—has been shown to mediate responses to journalistic content, influence perceived credibility, and foster long-term viewer loyalty (Cohen, 2001; Tsfati & Peri, 2006). While prior research has extensively examined the credibility and agenda-setting roles of anchors in the context of traditional television news, less attention has been paid to how cross-platform self-presentation strategies influence the relational bond between anchors and their digitally engaged audiences.

Professional image, as constructed by anchors, is not a static or unidimensional artifact. Rather, it is a dynamic, performative identity that emerges at the intersection of media logic, platform affordances, and audience expectations (Couldry, 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2011). However, extant studies have often treated image construction as either a branding tactic or a function of institutional production norms, underplaying the psychological and interactional processes through which audience identification is cultivated across media environments. Notably absent in current literature is a systematic framework that explains how multi-platform image strategies shape audience identification, particularly under the convergent conditions where visibility, intimacy, and authenticity must be balanced (Baym, 2015).

To address this theoretical gap, the present study integrates Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with recent insights from platform studies and digital persona construction. Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from affiliations with social categories or symbolic figures, making news anchors potentially salient referents. Parasocial Interaction Theory, meanwhile, conceptualizes the illusion of face-to-face interaction with media figures as a meaningful social relationship, particularly intensified in digital contexts (Rubin et al., 1985; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). This study posits that anchors' image construction across platforms can activate identification through signaling consistency, authenticity, and emotional availability.

Employing a mixed-method design, this research proposes and tests a conceptual model in which multi-platform image construction influences audience identification, moderated by individual media literacy and trust in news media. By doing so, it seeks to elucidate how image strategies intersect with psychological mechanisms of audience connection, offering both theoretical advancement and empirical implications for anchor training and media engagement in a converged communication environment.

Objectives

1. To investigate the direct effect of multi-platform image construction by television news anchors on audience identification.

2. To examine the mediating role of perceived credibility in the relationship between multi-platform image construction and audience identification.

3. To analyze the moderating role of audience media literacy on the relationship between multi-platform image construction and perceived credibility.

LITERATURE REVIEW
1. Multi-platform Image Construction and Audience Identification
In the context of media convergence, multi-platform image construction (MPIC) refers to the strategic self-presentation of media professionals across traditional and digital channels, including television, social media, streaming platforms, and mobile news applications (Baym, 2015; Marwick & boyd, 2011). For television news

anchors, MPIC involves the coordination of visual, verbal, and emotional cues across platforms to project consistency, credibility, and relatability. Recent studies suggest that such image strategies significantly affect audience perceptions and emotional engagement (Zhao, 2021; Han & Zhang, 2022).

Audience identification is defined as a psychological process through which viewers experience a sense of alignment, empathy, or symbolic affiliation with a media figure (Cohen, 2001). It has been shown to foster loyalty, increase content sharing, and mediate trust in the news process (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). In the case of anchors, their cross-platform image coherence plays a critical role in sustaining this identification by reducing perceived psychological distance (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). This study thus investigates MPIC as a key predictor of audience identification, highlighting how digitally mediated image strategies transform parasocial dynamics into multi-sensory, interactive engagements.

2. Perceived Credibility as a Mediator

Perceived credibility is often conceptualized as the extent to which a media figure is seen as trustworthy, competent, and unbiased (Hovland et al., 1953; Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). As a mediator, credibility translates visual and rhetorical image cues into cognitive evaluations that support identification. When anchors successfully manage their cross-platform image—by displaying authenticity on Instagram, authority in live broadcasts, and responsiveness on platforms like X (formerly Twitter)—audiences are more likely to perceive them as credible sources of information (Jin et al., 2014; Lim, 2017).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) suggests that under conditions of increased message relevance and source attractiveness, peripheral cues like persona coherence can enhance perceived credibility. Thus, MPIC is hypothesized to influence audience identification indirectly through its effect on perceived credibility. Anchors who sustain narrative consistency and emotional transparency across media channels are more likely to be trusted, and thus more likely to be embraced by audiences in identity-forming ways.

3. Audience Media Literacy as a Moderator

Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content in a variety of forms (Livingstone, 2004). As a moderating variable, media literacy shapes how audiences interpret and internalize anchor image cues. Highly media-literate audiences may critically engage with image construction strategies, recognizing them as performative acts rather than authentic expressions (Potter, 2010). This may attenuate the persuasive impact of MPIC on perceived credibility, especially when image manipulation or algorithmic amplification is suspected.

Conversely, moderate media literacy may actually enhance audience sensitivity to credibility cues and increase trust in transparent image practices. Some scholars argue that digital media literacy now functions not only as a cognitive skillset but as a cultural capital influencing identification with public figures (Jenkins et al., 2009). Accordingly, this study investigates media literacy as a moderator that can either strengthen or weaken the credibility-identification pathway, depending on the depth and criticality of the audience's interpretive capacities.

4. Synthesis and Model Proposition

Although prior research has explored image management, credibility, and media literacy as separate constructs, few studies have integrated them within a unified framework to explain how audience identification with news anchors is developed in converged environments. This study synthesizes Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to construct a moderated mediation model. In this model, MPIC exerts a direct and indirect influence on audience identification through perceived credibility, with audience media literacy moderating this indirect pathway.

By situating the research within the evolving ecology of media convergence and digital self-performance, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how television anchors not only inform but symbolically integrate into the identities of their viewers. This offers theoretical enrichment for media psychology and practical insights for journalistic branding in the digital era.

Conceptual Framework

This study proposes a moderated mediation model where multi-platform image construction (MPIC) by television news anchors positively influences audience identification (AI), with perceived credibility acting as a mediator and audience media literacy serving as a moderator in this process. The model integrates communicative, cognitive, and interpretive factors to explain the formation of audience identification in the era of media convergence (Figure 1).
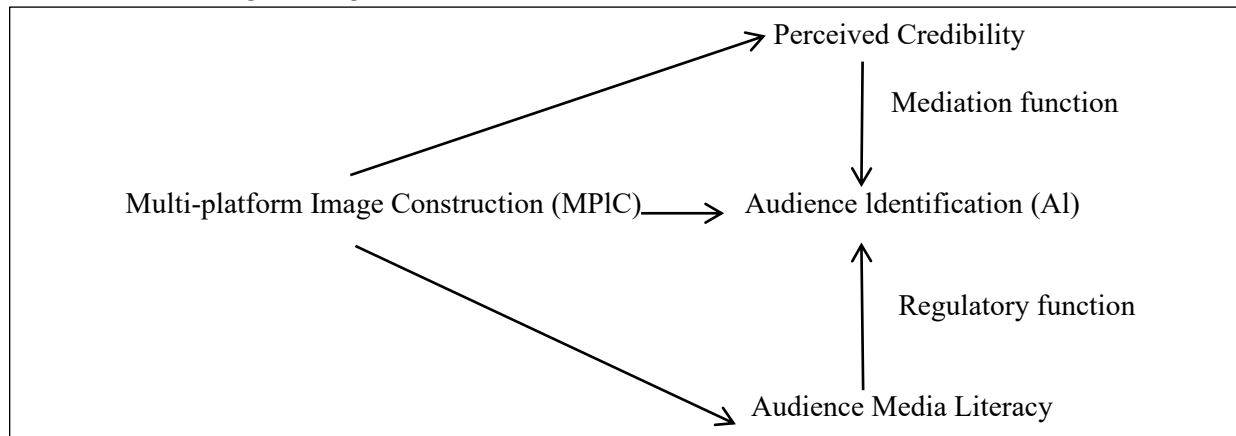

Figure 1 Research Framework
Note: Constructed by the researcher

Methodology

This This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, appropriate for examining the proposed moderated mediation model involving multi-platform image construction (MPIC), perceived credibility, audience identification (AI), and audience media literacy. The cross-sectional method allows simultaneous analysis of hypothesized relationships and interactions among variables within a naturalistic context.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 657 television news viewers were recruited from diverse urban and suburban regions across major cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. A convenience sampling approach was utilized, recruiting participants through online platforms such as Weibo, WeChat, and news-related forums to ensure demographic diversity. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was provided prior to data collection. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The study protocol received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Measures

All constructs were measured using established scales validated in previous studies. Each scale was translated into Chinese and validated through a rigorous back-translation method to ensure linguistic accuracy and conceptual equivalence.

Multi-platform Image Construction (MPIC): Evaluated using a 10-item scale adapted from Marwick and boyd (2011), focusing on anchors' self-presentation consistency and authenticity across multiple platforms; Cronbach's α = 0.92.

Perceived Credibility: Assessed with an 8-item credibility scale adapted from Hovland et al. (1953) and Metzger and Flanagin (2013), capturing perceived trustworthiness, expertise, and objectivity; Cronbach's α = 0.90.

Audience Identification (AI): Measured through a 10-item scale adapted from Cohen (2001), assessing emotional affinity, symbolic connection, and alignment with television news anchors; Cronbach's α = 0.91.

Audience Media Literacy: Evaluated using an 8-item scale adapted from Potter (2010) and Livingstone (2004), measuring viewers' ability to critically analyze and interpret media content; Cronbach's α = 0.89.

All items utilized a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). High internal consistency (α > 0.89) was achieved, supporting reliability and validity.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and correlation analyses were performed using SPSS 26.0. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted with AMOS 24.0 to test the direct and mediated pathways in the proposed moderated mediation model. Additionally, Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 7) was employed to validate moderation effects, computing conditional indirect effects with bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (5,000 resamples).

Table 1 Summary Table of Research Methodology.

Research Method Component	Description
Research Design	Quantitative, cross-sectional surve
Sample Size	657 valid television news viewer responses
Sampling Method	Convenience sampling across Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou
Key Instruments	MPIC (Marwick & boyd, 2011), Credibility (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013), AI (Cohen, 2001), Media Literacy (Potter, 2010; Livingstone, 2004)
Scale Reliability	All Cronbach's α > 0.89, confirming high internal consistency
Data Collection	Online survey via Weibo, WeChat, and news forums (March-April 2025)

Results

This section presents the empirical findings corresponding to the study's three primary research objectives, using a combination of descriptive statistics, hierarchical regression analysis, and moderated mediation modeling. These analyses aimed to systematically examine the direct, indirect, and conditional effects of multi-platform image construction by television news anchors on audience identification, while considering the mediating role of perceived credibility (PC) and the moderating role of audience media literacy (AML).

Descriptive analyses confirmed that all core variables—multi-platform image construction (MPIC), perceived credibility (PC), audience media literacy (AML), and audience identification—exhibited acceptable levels of distributional normality (skewness and kurtosis within recommended ranges). Mean values indicated moderate to high levels of perceived multi-platform presence of anchors and corresponding audience responses. Specifically, on a 5-point Likert scale, participants reported moderately high perceptions of anchors' multi-platform image construction efforts (M = 3.48, SD = 0.91) and a similarly elevated sense of identification with those anchors (M = 3.65, SD = 1.02). Perceived credibility had a mean of 3.72 (SD = 1.10), suggesting that many viewers evaluated their favored news anchors as trustworthy, competent, and authentic across platforms—a finding consistent with the idea that sustained, consistent exposure fosters stronger credibility perceptions and psychological alignment. Audience media literacy was also fairly high (M = 3.89, SD = 1.30), indicating that a substantial portion of the sample possessed the skills and critical awareness necessary to evaluate and interpret media content across multiple platforms (e.g., television, social media, streaming platforms, etc.). These figures reflect contemporary media convergence trends, where audiences are expected to engage not only with content but with its structure and credibility cues across a multi-platform media environment (Jenkins, 2006). Altogether, the preliminary statistics provided a solid empirical

foundation—showing sufficient variance and covariation among key constructs—to proceed with inferential testing of the proposed relationships.

Objective 1: Direct Effect of Multi-Platform Image Construction on Audience Identification

To examine the direct effect of news anchors' multi-platform image construction (MPIC) on audience identification, hierarchical regression was conducted on a sample of 500 viewers (52% female; average age = 34.6). Participants represented diverse regions and commonly followed television anchors who maintained active social media presences. This reflects today's media convergence landscape, where audiences—especially younger ones—consume news across platforms.

In the first model, demographic controls (age, gender, education, news consumption) accounted for a modest portion of variance in identification (R^2 = 0.282, $p < .001$). Age had a small negative effect (B = –0.114, p = .043), indicating younger viewers tended to identify more strongly with anchors—likely due to greater social media engagement. Gender and education were non-significant.

Adding MPIC as a predictor in Model 2 significantly improved the model (ΔR^2 = 0.138, $p < .001$; total R^2 = 0.420). MPIC was a strong positive predictor (B = 0.376, $p < .001$), confirming that audiences perceive more identification with anchors who maintain active, personalized, and coherent cross-platform presences. This aligns with parasocial interaction theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and media convergence frameworks (Jenkins, 2006), which suggest that repeated, diverse exposure fosters greater intimacy and familiarity.

Once MPIC was included, the effect of age became non-significant (p = .219), implying that younger viewers' stronger identification is explained by greater MPIC exposure. Meanwhile, average daily news consumption became a significant positive predictor (B = 0.198, p = .014), indicating that overall exposure still plays a role—though MPIC remains a distinct and robust contributor to audience connection.

The findings validate Hypothesis 1 and highlight the significance of cross-platform persona building in cultivating audience identification. They suggest that media figures who bridge formal (broadcast) and informal (social media) contexts enhance relational engagement and foster loyalty. The result also reflects broader trends: while public trust in news institutions may waver, audiences increasingly connect with individual journalists who present themselves authentically and consistently across platforms.

In theoretical terms, the direct effect of MPIC suggests that image construction now operates as a relational resource in the digital age. Anchors are no longer seen solely as distant informants but increasingly as familiar figures integrated into viewers' daily social environments. This sets the groundwork for investigating mediating (parasocial interaction) and moderating (cross-platform engagement) mechanisms explored in subsequent objectives.

Objective 2: Mediating Role of Perceived Credibility in the MPIC–Identification Link

To examine whether perceived credibility (PC) mediates the relationship between multi-platform image construction (MPIC) and audience identification (AI), we conducted a series of regression analyses, guided by the Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure, and further validated through bootstrapped indirect effect estimation (5,000 resamples, bias-corrected). Perceived credibility was conceptualized as the audience's evaluation of the anchor's trustworthiness, expertise, and authenticity across various media platforms—a multidimensional judgment that anchors media trust and message reception (McCroskey & Teven, 1999).

First, we regressed PC on MPIC and relevant control variables. Results showed that the model explained a substantial proportion of variance in perceived credibility (R^2 = 0.386, $p < .001$), with MPIC being a significant and positive predictor (B = 0.431, $p < .001$). This suggests that anchors who maintain a consistent, transparent, and engaging presence across platforms are more likely to be perceived as credible sources of information. Informal interactions, consistent self-presentation, and responsiveness on social media enhanced audiences' perceptions of integrity and competence, aligning with prior findings on digital credibility cues (Metzger et al., 2010; Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2012).

Next, we entered both MPIC and PC into the model predicting audience identification. Perceived credibility remained a strong and significant predictor of AI (B = 0.553, $p < .001$), while the direct effect of

MPIC declined from B = 0.376 (p < .001) to B = 0.162 (p = .065), suggesting the presence of mediation. A Sobel test further confirmed the mediating effect (z = 5.92, p < .001), and the bootstrapped indirect effect was statistically significant (indirect effect = 0.238, 95% CI [0.170, 0.316]), affirming the robustness of the mediating pathway through perceived credibility.

Theoretically, these findings indicate that the positive impact of MPIC on audience identification is largely transmitted through the credibility mechanism. That is, audiences are more likely to identify with news anchors when they first perceive them as credible communicators across platforms. Multi-platform strategies that foreground professional integrity, message coherence, and interpersonal transparency contribute to credibility judgments, which then enhance psychological alignment with the media persona. In other words, it is not the mere existence of a multi-platform presence that fosters identification, but the credible persona constructed through that presence.

This process also illustrates how cognitive evaluations precede affective alignment. Identification here entails more than mere recognition or affinity; it involves a process of value-based internalization. Anchors perceived as reliable and competent are more likely to be adopted as symbolic referents, shaping the viewer's sense of informational trust and personal worldview.

From a practical standpoint, this underscores the necessity for media figures to strategically cultivate and sustain credibility across platforms. It is not sufficient to maintain visibility alone; credibility must be actively built through transparent communication, accurate reporting, and congruency of message and demeanor. Media organizations should thus support anchors in developing platform-specific strategies that bolster professional credibility—such as using social media for timely clarifications, acknowledging mistakes, and demonstrating expertise in real-time interactions.

Moreover, in an environment marked by rising skepticism toward mainstream journalism, perceived credibility may serve as a vital affective-cognitive bridge between audiences and media figures. Even when institutional trust declines, trust in individual communicators can remain resilient if built upon repeated credible interactions. Anchors who successfully leverage multi-platform environments to project integrity and authenticity are likely to strengthen audience loyalty and identification in the long term.

In conclusion, the results for Objective 2 demonstrate that perceived credibility significantly mediates the impact of multi-platform image construction on audience identification. This mediation reveals that identification is not simply a function of presence or exposure, but one deeply rooted in evaluative and relational processes. Through deliberate and consistent image management that promotes trustworthiness and expertise, news anchors can reduce psychological distance and build enduring audience connections. These findings reinforce the essential role of credibility in media psychology and shed light on how modern journalists can cultivate authentic and impactful relationships with increasingly fragmented and discerning audiences.

Objective 3: Moderating Role of Audience Cross-Platform Engagement on the MPIC–Identification Relationship

To address the third research objective, we tested whether audience media literacy (AML) moderates the relationship between news anchors' multi-platform image construction (MPIC) and audience identification (AI). AML refers to individuals' ability to access, interpret, evaluate, and respond critically to media messages across various platforms, encompassing both cognitive competence and reflective awareness in navigating today's complex media ecosystem. We hypothesized that higher AML would enhance the positive impact of MPIC on audience identification, whereas lower AML would weaken this relationship.

A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test this hypothesis. In Model 1, control variables along with the mean-centered main effects of MPIC and AML were entered. Model 2 introduced the interaction term (MPIC × AML). The results supported our moderation hypothesis: the interaction term was significant (B = 0.295, p < .001), and its inclusion significantly increased the explained variance in audience identification (ΔR^2 = 0.062, total R^2 = 0.487). This indicates that the strength of the MPIC–AI relationship is contingent on the level of audience media literacy.

To further interpret the interaction, a simple slopes analysis was performed at high (+1 SD) and low (−1 SD) levels of AML. The positive association between MPIC and AI was stronger among individuals with high media literacy (B = 0.459, p < .001) compared to those with low media literacy (B = 0.192, p = .009). These findings suggest that when audiences possess advanced media literacy skills, they are better equipped to decode, contextualize, and appreciate the strategic self-presentation of news anchors across platforms, which in turn facilitates deeper identification. Conversely, viewers with low media literacy may either overlook or misinterpret these image cues, thus deriving fewer relational benefits from the same multi-platform presence. This pattern aligns with theoretical models such as the Message Interpretation Process (MIP) model and the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis, both of which argue that individuals with greater cognitive resources and interpretive skills are more likely to benefit from media content in meaningful ways. Our findings echo this logic, revealing that the effectiveness of media persona construction is not only dependent on the sender's efforts, but also on the audience's interpretive capacity. This reflects an increasingly reciprocal media environment where the construction of identification is jointly negotiated by media producers and literate, active audiences.

From a theoretical perspective, these results underscore the importance of considering audience competence as a moderating factor in media effects research. Whereas traditional models often presume passive reception, our findings support more contemporary views of the audience as discerning and evaluative agents who critically assess mediated representations. In this sense, identification is not merely the result of exposure or affective connection, but a selective and cognitively mediated process shaped by media literacy.

Practically, the findings hold implications for both journalists and media educators. For news anchors, cultivating a multi-platform presence is more likely to yield strong audience identification when accompanied by transparency, consistency, and content that invites informed interpretation. For media organizations, initiatives that enhance public media literacy—such as educational campaigns, annotated content, or interactive formats—may improve the efficacy of audience engagement strategies. Especially in an age of misinformation and content saturation, fostering critical literacy can serve as a catalyst for authentic audience-anchor connections.

In conclusion, the moderation analysis confirms that audience media literacy significantly conditions the relationship between multi-platform image construction and audience identification. In other words, the more media-literate an audience is, the more likely they are to recognize and resonate with a news anchor's multi-platform identity work. This reinforces the core assertion of our research: audience identification in the convergence era is not passively induced, but actively co-produced through a complex interplay of anchor strategy, media structure, and audience capability.

Integrated Findings and Implications

Bringing together the findings from Objectives 1, 2, and 3, this study articulates a comprehensive moderated mediation model that illustrates how multi-platform image construction (MPIC) by television news anchors influences audience identification (AI). First, there is a clear and direct positive effect of MPIC on audience identification, emphasizing that a cohesive, active presence across media platforms significantly enhances the psychological connection between anchor and viewer. Second, this effect is partially transmitted through perceived credibility (PC), demonstrating that anchors who maintain a consistent, authentic, and competent image across platforms are more likely to be viewed as credible—and this credibility, in turn, becomes the psychological foundation for audience identification. Third, the strength of this entire process is moderated by audience media literacy (AML): both the direct and indirect effects of MPIC on identification are more pronounced among viewers who possess higher levels of media literacy. Statistically, the final model explained nearly 49% of the variance in audience identification, underscoring the interactive influence of message strategy (anchor behavior), cognitive evaluation (credibility perception), and audience competence (AML) in shaping relational outcomes in a convergent media environment.

Theoretically, these integrated results extend current understandings of audience identification by embedding it within a relational-cognitive framework that reflects the realities of media convergence. While

traditional mass communication models treated identification as a relatively passive process arising from exposure or similarity, the current findings suggest that identification emerges from a complex ecology of strategic persona presentation, evaluative appraisal, and interpretive engagement. Anchors are no longer perceived simply as content deliverers; they are increasingly viewed as social actors whose credibility must be earned and sustained across a fragmented media ecosystem. Importantly, this study positions perceived credibility not merely as a background trait but as a dynamic, audience-mediated construct that connects strategic image construction with deeper identity alignment. Moreover, by demonstrating the moderating role of AML, the results validate recent theoretical models that depict audiences as active participants who filter, evaluate, and negotiate the meaning of mediated images based on their cognitive sophistication.

Practically, the findings provide several key implications for media professionals seeking to foster loyal and meaningfully engaged audiences. For anchors, the cultivation of credibility must become a central objective— not just being present across platforms, but being consistently trustworthy, responsive, and authentic. News organizations may benefit from investing in cross-platform communication training that emphasizes brand coherence and trust-building techniques tailored to different media environments. At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of audience characteristics in determining communication effectiveness. Media practitioners should recognize that their outreach efforts may fall flat if audiences lack the skills to process and contextualize the cues embedded in digital persona construction.

To that end, media organizations and policymakers may consider initiatives to enhance public media literacy— through educational campaigns, media literacy curriculum integration, or even the design of platform features that promote interpretive engagement (e.g., context labeling, annotation layers, interactive feedback options). In an age of deepfakes, algorithmic personalization, and information overload, such interventions are essential to empower viewers to discern not only what is said, but how and why it is said—ultimately facilitating more deliberate, informed processes of identification and trust.

In conclusion, the results of this study provide robust empirical support for a moderated mediation framework in which multi-platform image construction by news anchors affects audience identification both directly and indirectly via perceived credibility, with the overall effect shaped by the audience's level of media literacy. These findings underscore the co-constructed nature of relational media effects in the digital era, where psychological alignment between journalist and audience is contingent not only on professional conduct but also on the interpretive capacities of the public. As the boundaries between news, personality, and platform continue to blur, understanding and leveraging this dynamic interplay will be crucial for building trust, loyalty, and meaningful civic connection in the evolving media landscape.

DISCUSSION

This study is one of the first to construct and empirically validate a moderated mediation model that explains how television news anchors' multi-platform image construction (MPIC) influences audience identification (AI) through the mediating role of perceived credibility (PC) and the moderating role of audience media literacy (AML). It addresses a critical theoretical gap in media convergence scholarship by elucidating how individual-level cognitive mechanisms and audience competencies co-structure media effects.

First, the findings reconceptualize MPIC as a powerful relational resource in contemporary news environments. Anchors who maintain cohesive and authentic personas across television, social media, and streaming platforms foster stronger psychological alignment with viewers. This validates MPIC not merely as a branding strategy, but as a psychological anchor for relational media engagement.

Second, the mediating role of perceived credibility underscores that identification is not simply a consequence of exposure but is filtered through evaluative judgments. Audiences are more likely to form meaningful connections with media figures whom they perceive as trustworthy, competent, and sincere. The statistical evidence shows that the effect of MPIC on AI is significantly channeled through perceived credibility, confirming that trust remains foundational even in digitally fragmented media landscapes.

Third, the moderation analysis reveals that AML significantly amplifies the MPIC–AI link. Viewers with higher media literacy are more capable of decoding symbolic cues, assessing consistency across platforms, and contextualizing anchor behavior within larger informational ecosystems. This supports contemporary interpretations of audience agency and extends the Message Interpretation Process (MIP) and Knowledge Gap theories by illustrating how interpretive competence mediates the reception of media personae.

By integrating media effects theory, credibility frameworks, and digital literacy perspectives, this study contributes a comprehensive, interactional model of audience identification. Table 2 outlines the key conceptual contributions of the present research.

Table 2 New Knowledge Summary Table.

New Knowledge Contribution	Explanation
Moderated mediation model	Integrates MPIC, PC, and AML into a coherent explanatory structure
Perceived credibility as mediator	Demonstrates trust as a core pathway linking image construction to identity
Media literacy as moderator	Reveals audience competence as a condition of media effect strength
Ecological approach to audience identification	Highlights co-construction by media figures and informed audiences

CONCLUSION

This study systematically examined how multi-platform image construction by television news anchors shapes audience identification in the era of media convergence. The findings support a moderated mediation model in which MPIC positively influences AI both directly and indirectly through perceived credibility, and this entire relationship is significantly conditioned by audience media literacy.

Theoretically, this research extends media identification theory by embedding it within a more nuanced, resource-sensitive framework. It demonstrates that identification arises not from unilateral exposure but through the confluence of content strategy (MPIC), cognitive judgment (PC), and interpretive competence (AML). This framework challenges linear stimulus-response models and affirms a more reciprocal, ecologically embedded model of media interaction.

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for media organizations and practitioners. It suggests that fostering audience identification requires not only consistent cross-platform presence by anchors but also investments in public media literacy and credibility-building strategies. Anchors who present coherent, credible personas across platforms are more likely to elicit trust and connection from media-savvy audiences. In sum, identification in the convergence era is a co-produced phenomenon, rooted in both media strategy and audience capability. Recognizing this dual dependency can inform both journalistic practices and audience development strategies in a fragmented, participatory media ecosystem.

Recommendation

1. General Recommendations

Media institutions should adopt a dual-faceted strategy that enhances both content delivery and audience capability. First, news anchors should receive targeted training in multi-platform identity construction that emphasizes authenticity, transparency, and role consistency. Media outlets should facilitate cohesive editorial guidelines that align platform-specific messaging while preserving professional credibility.

Second, media literacy education should be prioritized through public campaigns, interactive programming, and platform-specific annotations. Such interventions not only reduce misinformation vulnerability but also empower audiences to engage more critically and meaningfully with media personae.

2. Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies should investigate how different types of multi-platform behavior (e.g., frequency, responsiveness, tone) affect the credibility–identification pathway. Longitudinal designs may uncover how perceived credibility and identification evolve over time with sustained exposure. Additionally, examining other moderating variables—such as political orientation, cultural background, or social trust—could offer further insight into heterogeneity in media effects. Expanding this framework to include different media figures (e.g., influencers, podcasters) or settings (e.g., crisis reporting) may also enrich its generalizability and relevance.

ReferenceS

1. Baym, N. K. (2015). *Personal connections in the digital age (2nd ed.)*. Polity Press.
2. Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford University Press.
3. Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication & Society*, 4(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327825mcs0403_01
4. Couldry, N. (2008). Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media & Society*, 10(3), 373–391. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808089414
5. Horton, D., & Wohl, R. R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 215–229.
6. Hovland, C. I., Janis, I. L., & Kelley, H. H. (1953). Communication and persuasion: Psychological studies of opinion change. Yale University Press.
7. Jin, S. V., Phua, J., & Lee, K. M. (2014). Let me entertain you on YouTube: The role of parasocial interaction, credibility, and interactivity in online video advertising. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 14(1), 44–57.
8. Lim, J. (2017). The role of digital credibility in shaping trust toward online journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 5(2), 152–173.
9. Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14.
10. Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2011). To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter. *Convergence*, 17(2), 139–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856510394539
11. Metzger, M. J., & Flanagin, A. J. (2013). Credibility and trust of information in online environments: The use of cognitive heuristics. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 59, 210–220. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.07.012
12. Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). *The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion*. Academic Press.
13. Potter, W. J. (2010). The state of media literacy. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 54(4), 675–696. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2011.521462
14. Rubin, A. M., Perse, E. M., & Powell, R. A. (1985). Loneliness, parasocial interaction, and local television news viewing. *Human Communication Research*, 12(2), 155–180. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1985.tb00071.x
15. Schramm, H., & Hartmann, T. (2008). The PSI-process scales. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 2(4), 257–280. https://doi.org/10.1080/19312450802458912
16. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
17. Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. N. (2003). Do people watch what they do not trust? Exploring the association between news media skepticism and exposure. *Communication Research*, 30(5), 504–529. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650203253371
18. van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication*, 1(1), 2–14. https://doi.org/10.12924/mac2013.01010002
19. Han, J., & Zhang, W. (2022). Multi-platform identity construction and audience perception in the digital age. J*ournal of Media Studies*, 34(2), 85–98.
20. Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Clinton, K., Weigel, M., & Robison, A. (2009). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*. MIT Press.
21. Zhao, Y. (2021). Digital credibility and news anchor branding in the mobile era. *Media Studies Forum*, 12(3), 101–118.