

IMITATION OF SINGING STYLES FROM TELEVISION TALENT SHOWS AMONG MUSIC MAJOR STUDENTS AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Television talent shows have become influential agents in shaping contemporary vocal aesthetics, yet their impact on formally trained music students remains conceptually underexamined within higher music education. Existing scholarship often treats media influence either as cultural exposure or as a technical concern, without theorizing imitation as a pedagogically mediated learning process operating across overlapping regimes of aesthetic authority. Addressing this gap, this article develops an interpretive framework that integrates media theory, cultural learning perspectives, and contemporary vocal pedagogy to examine media-driven singing style imitation among music major students. The analysis identifies three interrelated dimensions which are technical, expressive, and repertoire/genre-oriented imitation, and evaluates their enabling and constraining implications for vocal development. Rather than framing imitation as a deficit of originality, the study reconceptualizes it as a negotiated developmental threshold whose educational significance depends on the presence of critical pedagogical mediation, thereby offering a structured analytical model for understanding mediated vocal formation in contemporary higher music training.

Keywords: *music major students; television talent shows; singing style imitation; vocal pedagogy; popular music education*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Media-Saturated Vocal Cultures and Shifting Pedagogical

Over the last two decades, television talent shows have consolidated their role as influential infrastructures of popular vocal culture. Their significance extends beyond entertainment: through repeated exposure, competitive dramaturgy, and public adjudication, these programs participate in the *aesthetic codification* of singing: stabilizing particular timbral ideals, expressive conventions, and performance scripts as socially legible indicators of “success” (Shuker, 2012; Williams, 2019). As performances circulate across broadcast television, streaming platforms, and algorithm-driven short-form media, televised exemplars increasingly shape collective expectations regarding what a compelling voice should sound like and do.

This media ecology positions music major students within an unusually hybrid learning landscape. Whereas earlier cohorts largely encountered vocal authority through teachers, studio traditions, and canonical repertoires, contemporary students negotiate a distributed system of influence in which institutional instruction intersects with mediated performance culture. Televised singers and celebrity judges often function as high-visibility arbiters of value, shaping students’ stylistic aspirations and evaluative habits (Liu, 2018; Feng, 2017). Consequently, the boundary between curricular vocal norms and popular-media aesthetics is not simply blurred; it is continuously renegotiated in students’ everyday practice.

Such conditions carry direct consequences for higher music education. Institutional vocal training is commonly oriented toward technical coherence, physiological sustainability, and long-term artistic development (Chandler, 2014; Naismith, 2019). By contrast, televised competitions frequently reward immediacy, affective impact, and market resonance, priorities amplified by production choices and audience-facing evaluation (Shuker, 2012). The resulting tension is therefore not reducible to “classical versus popular.” It reflects competing evaluative regimes that raise questions about *epistemic authority*, technique, and the formation of vocal identity in contemporary pedagogy.

1.2 Imitation in a Media-Driven Learning Environment: Emerging Complexities

Imitation is widely recognized as a foundational process in musical skill acquisition. Cultural learning perspectives conceptualize imitation as adaptive rather than merely reproductive—operating alongside innovation in the transmission and transformation of artistic practice (Legare & Nielsen, 2015). In vocal domains, empirical work linking auditory perception, speech imitation capacity, and singing competence underscores imitation’s functional role in the development of vocal control and stylistic sensitivity (Christiner & Reiterer, 2013; Valles et al., 2018).

Yet imitation becomes pedagogically more intricate when the primary models are mediated. Music major students frequently absorb vocal gestures, expressive templates, and stylistic devices from televised performances, sometimes through intentional emulation and sometimes through repeated exposure that normalizes particular sonic ideals. The difficulty is that televised aesthetics are shaped by commercial imperatives and narrative dramatization—conditions that do not necessarily align with principles of vocal health, technical continuity, or developmental sustainability (Chandler, 2014; Li, 2024; Lemon-McMahon, 2022). In other words, what is rewarded on-screen may be effective as spectacle while remaining pedagogically ambiguous as technique.

From a higher-education standpoint, this produces a structural dilemma rather than a simple curricular disagreement. Rejecting media-influenced styles outright risks misrecognizing students' lived musical cultures and the identity work they undertake through contemporary popular singing (Williams, 2019). Conversely, treating mediated aesthetics as automatically legitimate can collapse the distinction between exploratory stylistic borrowing and physiologically grounded technique. The issue, then, is not whether imitation occurs, but how it is *mediated*, interpreted, and transformed within formal training contexts.

1.3 Research Gap: The Missing Integration of Media, Imitation, and Vocal Pedagogy

Despite increasing scholarly attention to media influence, popular music aesthetics, and imitation theory, conceptual integration remains uneven. First, much research on media effects emphasizes general audiences or informal learners, while music major students in structured higher education receive comparatively limited analytical focus. This matters because formally trained students negotiate mediated exemplars within an already codified technical and pedagogical framework. Second, imitation research often foregrounds cognitive mechanisms or cultural transmission models (Legare & Nielsen, 2015; Hussein et al., 2017), whereas vocal pedagogy typically centers on technique, stylistic authenticity, and identity formation (Chandler, 2014; Naismith, 2019; Lemon-McMahon, 2022). These literatures frequently develop in parallel rather than in dialogue, leaving imitation's pedagogical stakes under-specified. Third, although Liu (2018) and Feng (2017) identify educational impacts of television talent shows, their accounts remain largely descriptive and do not robustly theorize imitation as a mediated learning process requiring pedagogical mediation.

Accordingly, a gap persists in research that synthesizes media theory, imitation theory, and contemporary vocal pedagogy to explain how televised singing models shape music majors' stylistic development and how educators might interpret such influence beyond surface stylistics. Addressing this gap is necessary for conceptualizing imitation not as mere copying but as a structurally situated practice embedded in contemporary media culture. At the core of this inquiry lies a more

specific conceptual problem: while media-influenced singing among formally trained students is frequently acknowledged either as cultural exposure or as a technical concern, it is seldom theorized as a pedagogically mediated learning process unfolding across overlapping regimes of aesthetic authority. As a result, existing discussions tend to isolate media influence from instructional practice, or to treat imitation as an issue of stylistic preference rather than as a structurally embedded dimension of contemporary vocal formation. Clarifying this conceptual blind spot is essential for understanding how imitation operates within higher music education and how it might be engaged productively rather than reactively.

1.4 Purpose and Scholarly Contribution

Specifically, the study conceptualizes television talent shows as informal yet consequential pedagogical environments that operate alongside institutional vocal training. It then identifies the primary forms of imitation exhibited by music major students and examines both the enabling and constraining consequences of such imitation for vocal development. Finally, the study articulates pedagogical strategies that mediate media influence while supporting sustainable vocal identity formation.

The contribution of this research is threefold. Theoretically, it extends imitation theory into the context of higher music education by situating imitation within shifting regimes of mediated authority. Analytically, it proposes a structured typology of imitation -technical, expressive, and repertoire/genre-oriented- to account for the multidimensional ways in which media influence operates in practice. Pedagogically, it reframes imitation as a negotiable developmental threshold, suggesting that imitation can catalyze growth when guided toward reflective appropriation rather than remaining at the level of unexamined replication.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Derived from the conceptual problem and gap articulated above, this study is organized around four interlocking research questions. Together, they provide a sequential analytic pathway from contextual influence to pedagogical response allowing imitation to be examined as a media-mediated learning process rather than an isolated stylistic preference.

RQ1: How do television talent shows shape the singing styles of music major students?

RQ2: What forms of imitation emerge among music major students in relation to televised vocal exemplars?

RQ3: What enabling and constraining consequences do these imitation practices generate for vocal development?

RQ4: What pedagogical implications follow for higher music education when mediated imitation becomes a salient feature of students' training ecologies?

3. APPROACH

This article adopts a conceptual and interpretive mode of inquiry grounded in interdisciplinary literature engagement. Rather than presenting primary empirical data, the study advances a theoretically situated analysis of media-driven singing style imitation by bringing into dialogue scholarship from media studies, cultural learning theory, and contemporary vocal pedagogy. These bodies of work are treated not as discrete strands, but as intersecting perspectives through which the pedagogical significance of imitation can be more fully understood.

The four research questions provide the structural orientation for the analysis, guiding the examination from contextual influence to pedagogical implication. Literature was engaged selectively and critically, with priority given to works that illuminate mechanisms of mediated aesthetic authority, conceptualizations of imitation as a learning process, and ongoing debates surrounding technique, sustainability, and vocal identity formation. Through comparative reading and thematic synthesis, points of convergence and tension across these discussions were identified. On this basis, the study develops a typological framework—distinguishing technical, expressive, and repertoire/genre-oriented imitation—as an analytical lens for interpreting how televised vocal models are internalized and negotiated within formal training environments.

The objective is therefore not empirical generalization, but conceptual clarification. By articulating a coherent interpretive framework, the study seeks to render media-influenced imitation analytically visible and pedagogically meaningful within higher music education. Analytically, the discussion treats mediated exemplars as mechanisms of aesthetic authority, imitation as an adaptive learning practice, and pedagogy as the mediating layer that determines whether imitation consolidates into replication or develops toward transformation. To enhance analytical transparency, the literature informing this study was selected through purposive sampling guided by conceptual relevance rather than exhaustive systematic review. Sources were drawn primarily from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly monographs, and doctoral research that directly address media influence in music education, theories of imitation and cultural learning, and contemporary vocal pedagogy. Priority was given to works that have demonstrated disciplinary impact, theoretical clarity, or sustained citation within their respective fields.

The analytical procedure involved close reading, thematic mapping, and comparative interpretation across these bodies of scholarship in order to identify recurring tensions, conceptual convergences, and pedagogical implications. The resulting typology was developed through iterative analytical clustering rather than quantitative coding. As a conceptual study, this approach does not claim

comprehensive coverage of all relevant literature. Instead, it aims to construct a theoretically coherent interpretive framework that can inform future empirical and longitudinal investigations.

4. MEDIATED AESTHETIC INFLUENCE ON MUSIC MAJOR STUDENTS' SINGING STYLES (ADDRESSING RQ1)

Television talent shows have become a salient mechanism through which contemporary vocal aesthetics are not only displayed but also *ratified* through public visibility, judging discourse, and competitive dramaturgy. For music major students, these programs constitute a pervasive reference system that mediates what counts as vocal “quality,” “authenticity,” and “impact.” In line with pluralistic accounts of music learning, mediated exemplars increasingly coexist with institutional instruction and, in some instances, recalibrate students’ evaluative repertoires for vocal achievement (Williams, 2019).

4.1 Visibility, Repetition, and the Formation of Reference Models

Students’ encounter with televised singing models is rarely episodic. Performances circulate across broadcast television, streaming platforms, and short-form social media, generating repeated exposure and algorithmically reinforced listening habits. Within such a distributional environment, certain vocal gestures—signature timbres, climactic belting, breathy intimacy, stylized rasp—acquire disproportionate salience because they are repeatedly framed as artistically compelling and competitively rewarded. This process aligns with observations that musical preferences and learning orientations are partly shaped through broader cultural and psychological mediation rather than classroom transmission alone (Brown, 2012).

Importantly, televised “success” is narratively curated: contestants’ backstories, judges’ commentary, and audience affect all operate as interpretive scaffolds that attach value to particular sound ideals. As a result, students may adopt televised exemplars as *benchmark performances* against which they measure progress, sometimes alongside or even prior to teacher-led criteria (Liu, 2018).

4.2 Aesthetic Codification and Stylistic Hybridization

Talent shows do not merely showcase singing; they participate in the *codification* of vocal aesthetics by repeatedly foregrounding specific expressive grammars—emotional intensification, timbral distinctiveness, and genre-blending arrangements. Popular music culture, as discussed by Shuker (2012), produces aesthetic norms through media representation, audience reception, and industry logics. In televised competitions, these logics frequently privilege immediacy and “moment-making” over subtle technical continuity.

For students, this can translate into an aesthetic re-prioritization: interpretive intensity becomes a proxy for artistry, while technical stability may be treated as secondary unless explicitly taught as enabling expressivity. Hybridization further complicates learning. Contest arrangements often merge pop, folk, jazz, and occasional classical inflections, which can blur stylistic boundaries and encourage surface-level stylistic borrowing in the absence of genre-sensitive pedagogical mediation (Chandler, 2014).

4.3 Recalibrating What Counts as “Good Singing”

Institutional vocal training often frames “good singing” through parameters such as technical control, vocal health, stylistic accuracy, and developmental sustainability. In contrast, talent shows frequently reward communicative immediacy, narrative credibility, and audience captivation. This divergence is not simply a matter of taste; it reflects competing regimes of evaluation. In popular music contexts, imitation and transformation can function as pathways through which originality is negotiated rather than negated (Negus et al., 2017).

When students internalize televised evaluative cues, their criteria for excellence may shift toward performative authenticity and affective persuasion. Such recalibration has instructional consequences: students may selectively invest in attention-grabbing effects that perform well in competitive formats while undervaluing slower, systematic technical work. As cautioned in discussions of contemporary vocal practices, stylistic innovations are pedagogically productive only when integrated with physiological awareness and technical coherence (Li, 2024).

4.4 Stylistic Orientation, Repertoire Choices, and Curriculum Friction

Beyond isolated techniques, mediated aesthetics can shape students’ broader stylistic orientation and repertoire selection. Competition-leaning songs—those enabling climactic arcs, emotional legibility, and timbral display—become attractive vehicles for demonstrating ability. Such preferences may, in turn, generate friction with curricula perceived as less immediately expressive or less aligned with contemporary cultural recognition (Liu, 2018).

Nevertheless, media influence does not operate as a deterministic force. Students often negotiate between teacher guidance and mediated models, adopting elements that resonate with their artistic self-concept. Cultural learning perspectives emphasize that imitation and innovation function jointly; thus, mediated imitation can serve as an entry point for stylistic exploration when supported by reflective instructional structures (Legare & Nielsen, 2015).

4.5 Summary of RQ1 Findings

Across these analyses, it becomes evident that television talent shows influence music major students' singing not merely through isolated stylistic references, but through a broader restructuring of how vocal value is perceived and validated. The repeated circulation of televised performers normalizes particular sonic and expressive ideals, while public adjudication and competitive framing contribute to the consolidation of these ideals as markers of excellence. In this way, mediated aesthetics do more than offer models for imitation; they recalibrate the evaluative landscape within which students position their own vocal development.

Understanding this reconfigured landscape is essential for examining how imitation subsequently materializes in practice. The following section therefore shifts from contextual influence to the specific modalities through which mediated models are internalized and enacted in students' vocal training.

5. TYPOLOGIES OF MEDIA-DRIVEN SINGING STYLE IMITATION (ADDRESSING RQ2)

To clarify how media influence materializes in students' practice, this section conceptualizes imitation as a multi-layered process operating across production, interpretation, and stylistic orientation. Consistent with cultural learning frameworks in which imitation is adaptive rather than merely reproductive (Legare & Nielsen, 2015), the following typology treats imitation as a repertoire of learnable practices that may either facilitate development or constrain it depending on pedagogical mediation.

5.1 Production-Level Imitation: Timbre, Effects, and Technical Gestures

At the level of vocal production, students often emulate salient features associated with televised performance identities. These include timbral coloring (e.g., breathiness, "bright" twang), vocal effects (e.g., controlled distortion, aspirated onset), and phrasing habits linked to perceived emotional sincerity. Because music major students typically possess refined auditory discrimination, they may reproduce micro-features of sound with considerable precision, aligning with evidence that vocal imitation is associated with auditory-perceptual capacities (Christiner & Reiterer, 2013).

The pedagogical risk emerges when students pursue sonic resemblance without understanding physiological cost or context-dependence. Genre-specific techniques may require targeted conditioning and technical safeguards (Chandler, 2014). Without such scaffolding, imitative production can become an expedient shortcut—optimized for immediate affect—rather than a sustainable technical pathway (Li, 2024).

5.2 Interpretive Imitation: Affective Scripts and Performance Semiotics

Televised performances are not purely auditory events; they are multisensor and semiotically saturated. Camera framing, facial close-ups, judges' talk, and audience reaction teach viewers *how* to read and reproduce emotional meaning. Students therefore may imitate not only vocal sound but also interpretive scripts: intensified dynamic shaping, dramatic breath placement, stylized articulation, and performative gestures that signal vulnerability or power.

Embodied accounts of musical interpretation support this view: bodily engagement during listening can shape subsequent vocal execution (Valles et al., 2018). The downside is interpretive convergence. When similar affective strategies are repeatedly rewarded on-screen, students may default to standardized expressive tropes, potentially narrowing individual interpretive voice and contributing to identity foreclosure (Lemon-McMahon, 2022).

5.3 Repertoire and Genre-Orientation Imitation: Song Choices and Stylistic Templates

A further dimension of imitation operates through repertoire selection and genre orientation. Competition formats tend to privilege songs that allow for climactic arcs, narrative clarity, and timbral display. Students may gravitate toward such repertoire as implicit proof of contemporary relevance and performance legitimacy (Liu, 2018). Over time, this can reshape learning trajectories: some students may deprioritize curricular materials perceived as mismatched with televised success.

Genre imitation becomes especially complex when shows promote hybridity. While hybridity reflects contemporary practice, it may also blur the pedagogical boundaries required for stylistic competence. Frameworks for Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) emphasize that commercial vocal styles benefit from systematic training rather than informal mimicry (Naismith, 2019). Without explicit instruction, students risk adopting genre markers as surface tokens rather than developing robust stylistic command.

5.4 From Replication to Transformation: Imitation as a Developmental Threshold

Imitation should not be reduced to mechanical copying. In popular music, originality is often produced through transformation—selective borrowing, recombination, and stylistic re-voicing (Negus et al., 2017). Cultural learning accounts similarly position imitation and innovation as co-constitutive processes (Legare & Nielsen, 2015). The critical question is whether students are supported in crossing the developmental threshold from resemblance-seeking to self-authored adaptation.

5.5 Summary of RQ2 Findings

The foregoing analysis has framed imitation as operating across multiple dimensions of vocal practice, encompassing aspects of sound production, interpretive construction, and repertoire orientation. Conceiving imitation in this layered manner makes visible the pathways through which mediated vocal models are absorbed into formal training environments. Rather than functioning as isolated stylistic gestures, these forms of imitation participate in shaping broader developmental trajectories. Recognizing this structural embedding provides the necessary groundwork for examining how such practices influence vocal sustainability, identity formation, and long-term artistic growth in the following section.

6. DEVELOPMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF MEDIA-INFLUENCED IMITATION (ADDRESSING RQ3)

The consequences of media-influenced imitation are best understood as contingent rather than uniform. The same imitative act may function as a productive scaffold for learning under guided instruction or as a risk factor when pursued without technical and reflective mediation. This section therefore examines both enabling and constraining outcomes while foregrounding conditions under which each is likely to occur.

6.1 Enabling Outcomes: Engagement, Expressive Sensitivity, and Stylistic Vocabulary

A prominent enabling effect of televised models is motivational intensification. Talent shows render vocal achievement visible, narratively meaningful, and socially rewarded, thereby making practice goals feel immediate and attainable. Media influence has been noted to shape motivation by aligning learning with emotionally salient aspirations (Florescu, 2014). For students, imitation can become a concrete entry point: reproducing a recognizable televised gesture offers a sense of progress and belonging within contemporary vocal culture.

Imitation can also sharpen expressive sensitivity. By tracking how televised singers shape phrasing, dynamics, and timbral nuance, students may develop heightened attentiveness to interpretive detail. Embodied research suggests that listening experiences can translate into performance decisions, implying that imitation may enrich interpretive responsiveness when coupled with technical grounding (Valles et al., 2018). Finally, imitation can expand stylistic vocabulary, especially within CCM-related practices. Exposure and emulation may serve as an initial phase through which students acquire genre-relevant devices prior to individualized refinement (Naismith, 2019). Under reflective instruction, such imitation can support flexibility rather than constrain voice.

6.2 Constraining Outcomes: Vocal Load, Technical Fragmentation, and Sustainability Risks

Problems arise when imitation is pursued as sonic resemblance without physiological insight. Competitive singing aesthetics often foreground high-intensity delivery and conspicuous effects, potentially increasing vocal load. Popular style techniques may be safe and effective, but they typically require context-specific coaching to avoid strain (Chandler, 2014). When students imitate effects without stabilizing breath management and laryngeal coordination, technical inefficiencies can accumulate and compromise sustainability (Li, 2024).

A second risk concerns technical fragmentation. Institutional pedagogy often aims to cultivate transferable technique across repertoire contexts; media-driven imitation may encourage compartmentalized skills optimized for particular performance moments. This can produce uneven development: strong impact in “showcase” passages but reduced consistency across diverse musical demands.

6.3 Aesthetic Convergence and Constraints on Identity Formation

Repeated exposure to a narrow set of rewarded vocal ideals may contribute to aesthetic convergence. Media platforms can normalize particular timbral and expressive signatures, implicitly suggesting that these are prerequisites for recognition. While popular music practices balance imitation and originality, an over-reliance on dominant templates may limit exploratory learning and reduce interpretive diversity (Negus et al., 2017).

From the standpoint of vocal identity, external models interact with personal self-concept and pedagogical guidance. If students’ self-evaluation becomes anchored primarily to mediated ideals, identity formation may tilt toward conformity rather than self-authored voice, echoing concerns about externally shaped vocal identity negotiation (Lemon-McMahon, 2022; Williams, 2019).

6.4 Developmental Trajectories: The Transition Problem

Imitation’s long-term value depends on whether learners transition from replication to autonomous application. In broader imitation-learning discourse, effective learning involves progressing beyond copying toward flexible skill deployment (Hussein et al., 2017). In vocal education, that transition requires pedagogical mediation: explicit reflection, technical troubleshooting, and guided experimentation. Without such mediation, media-influenced learning can reinforce performance-oriented goals at the expense of comprehensive musicianship, as noted in discussions of talent-show influence within music education contexts (Liu, 2018; Feng, 2017).

6.5 Summary of RQ3 Findings

Imitative practice occupies an inherently ambivalent position within vocal training. When situated within reflective and technically informed instruction, it can stimulate motivation, heighten expressive sensitivity, and provide an accessible point of stylistic engagement. However, when detached from critical guidance, the same practices may contribute to increased vocal strain, uneven technical development, and the premature stabilization of artistic identity around externally validated models.

The pedagogical question, therefore, is not whether imitation should occur, but how it is guided. The educational imperative lies in ensuring that imitation serves as a transitional phase within a broader developmental arc—one that moves toward transformation, individuation, and sustainable artistic formation rather than remaining confined to replication.

7. PEDAGOGICAL MEDIATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL RESPONSES (ADDRESSING RQ4)

If mediated imitation is understood as structurally embedded rather than incidental, pedagogical response should move beyond prohibition toward guided negotiation. The aim is not to sever students from contemporary vocal culture, but to translate media-driven aspirations into technically sustainable and artistically individuated development.

7.1 Reframing Imitation as a Pedagogical Threshold

Imitation occupies an ambivalent status in formal training: it is ubiquitous in early learning yet often stigmatized as unoriginal. Cultural learning perspectives complicate this binary by positioning imitation as developmentally functional when it is oriented toward eventual innovation (Legare & Nielsen, 2015). For instructors, the practical implication is to treat students' televised influences as diagnostic material—revealing what students value, what they attempt, and where technical misconceptions may reside—rather than as evidence of pedagogical failure.

7.2 Media-Literacy as Vocal Pedagogy: Evaluative Discernment and Critical Listening

Because television talent shows embed commercial and dramaturgical incentives, media literacy becomes a technical and interpretive necessity. Media-aware teaching can cultivate evaluative discernment: students learn to distinguish between acoustically/physiologically viable strategies and context-specific effects amplified by production, mixing, and visual framing. In CCM-oriented instruction, genre sensitivity is essential; televised performances can be used as comparative case materials to analyze registration, breath strategy, resonance choice, and stylistic appropriateness (Chandler, 2014; Naismith, 2019).

7.3 Aligning Technique with Expressivity: From “Effect-Chasing” to Sustainable Control

A persistent tension is the assumption that technical training reduces expressivity. Pedagogy can counter this by explicitly mapping technique to expressive affordances: stable breath management, efficient registration, and controlled onset choices expand interpretive range rather than constrain it. Embodied accounts of interpretation suggest that expressive intent is inseparable from physical organization (Valles et al., 2018). Framing technique as expressive infrastructure can help students reconcile institutional training with media-shaped aspirations.

7.4 Supporting Individuation: Transformative Borrowing and Identity Work

To reduce homogenization, instructors can foreground individuation as an explicit learning outcome. Identity-oriented teaching invites students to articulate artistic intentions, evaluate alignment with media models, and experiment with alternative interpretive solutions. In popular music practices, originality frequently emerges through transformation rather than rejection; pedagogy can operationalize this by assigning “transformative imitation” tasks—e.g., re-voicing a televised gesture in a different emotional stance, tempo, timbral palette, or narrative framing (Negus et al., 2017; Lemon-McMahon, 2022).

7.5 Instructor Competence in Contemporary Vocal Ecologies

Effective mediation requires teachers to engage with evolving performance norms. When instructional practice lags behind mediated aesthetics, students may default to the media as their primary authority. Professional dialogue and collaborative reflection among vocal teachers can support pedagogical adaptation and prevent rigid oppositions between “academic” and “popular” (Feng, 2017; Mesiä, 2019). Such competence enables teachers to translate contemporary styles into technically grounded training rather than treating them as external contamination.

7.6 Summary of RQ4 Findings

A defensively exclusionary stance toward media influence is unlikely to be pedagogically productive. What is required instead is a mode of instructional mediation that fosters critical discernment, sustains technical integrity, and supports the gradual individuation of vocal identity. Such mediation does not entail uncritical accommodation of televised aesthetics, nor does it demand their wholesale rejection. Rather, it involves guiding students in transforming externally sourced models into personally grounded and technically sustainable artistic practices. Under these conditions, higher music education can engage contemporary mediated vocal culture without relinquishing its commitments to physiological responsibility and long-term

artistic formation.

8. DISCUSSION

Media-driven singing style imitation among music major students cannot be adequately understood through conventional narratives of stylistic fashion or technical lapse. What emerges instead is a more fundamental reconfiguration of epistemic authority within vocal education, as mediated performance cultures increasingly participate in determining what is recognized as legitimate vocal achievement. Students' learning trajectories now unfold within an expanded evaluative field in which institutional pedagogies intersect with media-generated criteria of excellence. In this environment, television talent shows function not merely as entertainment platforms but as alternative loci of pedagogical influence, where visibility, competitive endorsement, and public discourse contribute to the normalization of particular vocal ideals (Shuker, 2012; Williams, 2019).

Viewed through the lens of cultural learning theory, imitation itself resists simplistic moralization. Rather than constituting evidence of pedagogical decline, it represents a generative mechanism whose developmental value depends on the conditions under which it is mediated. The technical inconsistencies, heightened vocal demands, and stylistic convergence observed in this study are more plausibly attributed to insufficient instructional framing than to imitation as such. Imitation becomes problematic only when it remains tethered to surface resemblance, without the reflective processes necessary for transformation and individuation.

The typological distinctions developed here—spanning production, interpretation, and repertoire orientation—demonstrate that mediated influence penetrates vocal training at multiple strata. This layered perspective shifts attention away from reductive accounts of media “effects” toward the broader pedagogical ecology within which vocal identity is negotiated and stabilized. In this sense, the categories function less as classificatory endpoints than as heuristic tools for tracing how mediated exemplars enter, circulate within, and reshape formal training practices.

Reconsidering the relationship between institutional vocal norms and televised aesthetics further complicates entrenched dichotomies. The tension between sustainability and immediacy, between technical coherence and affective persuasion, reflects divergent yet coexisting value orientations within contemporary musical culture. The pedagogical task is therefore not to adjudicate a winner between “academic” and “commercial” paradigms, but to facilitate informed negotiation between them, enabling students to move beyond imitation toward critical appropriation.

Taken together, this study contributes to ongoing discourse in three interrelated ways. It brings media theory, imitation theory, and vocal pedagogy into sustained

conversation; it reconceptualizes media-driven imitation as a structurally embedded learning practice situated within shifting regimes of authority; and it offers an analytically generative framework capable of informing subsequent empirical and longitudinal investigations. By positioning imitation as a negotiated developmental threshold, the discussion invites educators and researchers to move beyond reactive judgments and toward pedagogical strategies that uphold physiological responsibility while engaging the realities of contemporary cultural participation.

9. CONCLUSION

Singing style imitation among music major students should not be treated as a marginal stylistic byproduct of popular culture. It is better understood as evidence of a reconfigured ecology of vocal authority in which mediated exemplars participate in the codification of aesthetic norms and the public legitimation of particular forms of vocal excellence. In this environment, imitation functions as a structurally situated learning practice whose educational value depends on the extent of pedagogical mediation that supports movement from replication to reflective transformation.

By integrating media theory, cultural learning perspectives, and contemporary vocal pedagogy, this study offers a conceptual framework and typology that render media-driven imitation analytically visible across production, interpretation, and repertoire/genre orientation. The implication for higher music education is not to police media influence out of the studio, but to cultivate evaluative discernment and technically grounded appropriation so that mediated models become resources for vocational formation rather than constraints on sustainability and individuation. Future research can extend this conceptual groundwork through empirical and longitudinal designs to examine how mediated aesthetic regimes interact with technical development and identity trajectories over time, particularly within diverse institutional and cultural contexts.

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