Immersive Learning & the CNN Effect:

**Differentiated Factors Drive Media’s Influence Among Cadets**

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**Abstract**:

*Information warfare challenges, including the "CNN Effect," are increasing in quantity and complexity as the internet saturates modern life. Media communications, reliable or not, are constantly injected into American life, affecting opinions, decision-making, and actions—which may result in terrifying and permanent consequences when the media influences military members and government leaders.*

*Immersive education, such as wargaming, should be employed by educators to prepare the next generation for these challenges, including lessons on news literacy and information warfare. When topics such as propaganda are experienced through immersive learning, the population can begin to shield themselves against damaging external influences. This experiential learning develops deeper insight and ingenuity, which is necessary for national security and the defense of democracy.*

This research focuses on the immersive learning environment—an engaging, simulation-based educational experience with realistic conflict scenarios where students apply lesson objectives through hands-on activities. Instructors conduct immersive learning in the US Air Force Academy's Multi-Domain Laboratory. Traditionally, students were taught military strategy in a classroom where they engaged in wargaming by rolling dice using a board game. Now, the Military & Strategic Studies (MSS) Department uses hands-on, real-time wargaming with unique hardware and software to teach future leaders how to apply classroom concepts using experiential learning. Wargames are critical for meeting the priorities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—specifically, preparing leaders to conduct joint operations in all domains by integrating experiential learning. The guidance explains that "curricula should leverage live, virtual, constructive, and gaming methodologies with wargames… to develop deeper insight and ingenuity." The wargame with media provides external influences like news and information from various sources, which may influence students' decision-making process, resulting in "The CNN Effect."

"The CNN Effect" is a short-hand way to explain how news reports drive government leaders' responses, including military decision-making. This project builds upon existing research uniquely because this study examines decision-making from multiple leaders based on the same simulated media in the US Air Force Academy's immersive learning environment. This research uses archival data and qualitative analysis methods to explore how students act based on the wargame media inputs and compare course outcome differences after receiving enhanced Information Operations education. This project analyzes the impact of an Information Operations module, enhancing education on information warfare's influence on decision-making and trust for students. Students learned to identify and research information sources, analyze biases, opinion versus fact-based reporting, and compare news reports from various outlets.

**Keywords**: hybrid warfare, immersive learning environment, influence, information operations, media, military, news literacy, propaganda, psychological operations, scholarship of teaching and learning, wargaming