

NIMA SHIRALIZADEH PRESENTS HIS...

# BUS 318

CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This assignment explores how consumer psychology principles can be applied to understand their influence on consumer decision-making processes, focusing specifically on the purchase of video games as a consumer good.

The principles that will be applied are **motivation**, as a way of characterising the psychological core of a video game consumer, in conjunction with theories of **consumer social influence**, creating a clearer understanding of the consumer's culture (Hoyer, MacInnis and Pieters, 2018, p. 12, Exhibit 1.6).

## 1.2 VIDEO GAMES & RED DEAD REDEMPTION II (RDR2)

As aforementioned, this assignment focuses on how consumers make decisions relating to the purchase of video games. According to Statista (2024), the number of video game users worldwide is estimated to reach over three billion in 2029. To explore consumer decision-making processes in a nuanced capacity, the popular 2018 video game developed by Rockstar Games, Red Dead Redemption II (RDR2) will be explored (see Image 1).

Launched in October 2018, it has sold over sixty million units (Take-Two Interactive, 2024), and is renowned for pioneering storytelling, immersive world-building and expansive gameplay within the video game industry (Fields, 2024). Consumers take on the role of Arthur Morgan, an outlaw in the United States in 1899, embarking on a harsh yet stunningly immersive journey, as depicted in Image 2. RDR2 has various target audiences. Since it's rated an 18+ game due to mature themes, it is predominantly targeting adults. However, it's targeting audiences that enjoy action-adventure games, those who enjoy rich narrative-driven games, fans of the original RDR, or Rockstar Games enthusiasts.

Despite RDR2s appeal, 2018 was widely regarded as ‘one of the best years in video game history’, with major titles such as Marvel’s Spiderman and Assassin’s Creed Odyssey launching during this period (Cooper, 2018; Petty, 2019). The presence of these competing games would have influenced consumer decision-making, an aspect that will explored further in the assignment.



Image 1. Official Cover Art for Red Dead Redemption II (Rockstar Games, 2018a).



**Image 2.** A series of in-game promotional screenshots of Red Dead Redemption II (Rockstar Games, 2018a; 2018b).

## 2. CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY THEORIES

### 2.1 MOTIVATION: NEEDS

According to Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters (2018, p. 45), motivation is “an inner state of activation that provides energy needed to achieve a goal”. However, a motivated consumer is “energized, ready, and willing to engage in a goal-relevant activity” (Ibid, p. 45). This ‘inner state of activation’ is achieved when something is: (1) personally relevant; (2) consistent with the consumers’ self-concept, needs, goals, values, and self-control processes; (3) risky and or; (4) poses inconsistencies with prior attitudes (Ibid, p. 47). This assignment will focus on the consumers’ activation of needs.

Consumers experiencing a conundrum between their current and preferred state develop a ‘need’ (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters, 2018, p. 48). Maslow (1943) organises needs in a hierarchy of prepotency: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation (see Appendix A). Despite the prepotent nature of Maslow’s framework, needs aren’t rigidly sequential; reversals can occur – for example, an individual’s desire to fulfil esteem needs, may override their physiological needs (Ibid, pp. 386-387). This presents a more nuanced understanding of consumer decision-making.

### 2.2 MOTIVATION: BROADENING THE FRAMEWORK

Building on Section 2.1, Ligas (2000) and Ariely and Norton (2009) broaden the understanding of consumer motivation and Maslow (1943), offering insights into self-concept and conceptual value; leading to the emergence of a context-sensitive framework for understanding consumer decision-making. Ligas (2000) highlights that consumers seek for products aligning with their self-concept – coined ‘product-person congruity’. For example, a consumer seeking a product to satisfy a self-actualisation need would be motivated because it can enhance their sense of self. Akin to Maslow (1943, Ligas (2000, p. 986) ackn-

acknowledges that consumer priorities are dynamic, meaning specific needs may override others.

Ariely and Norton (2009) introduce the idea of ‘conceptual consumption’, emphasising that motivation extends beyond utility. They note consumers are driven by a product’s symbolic meaning – conceptual value – which fulfils expectations and supports social or personal goals (Ibid, p. 476). This notion builds on Maslow (1943) by outlining how conceptual value gains prominence as consumers navigate the hierarchy – the product loses utilitarian value, while its potency in fulfilling identity-driven goals becomes paramount. For example, a video game initially purchased for entertainment may later become a means of reinforcing the consumer’s identity as a serious gamer, to achieve esteem or self-actualisation needs.

### **2.3 CONSUMER SOCIAL INFLUENCE**

Exposure to information from “implicit or explicit pressures” within the consumers environment that affect their behaviour, is recognised as social influence (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters, 2018, p. 292). These are divided into non-marketing and marketing categories, which comprise of marketing agents such as advertising, and non-marketing agents such as friends – see Appendix B (Ibid, pp. 294-295). The major difference dictating the reach for both is if they are delivered through mass-media or personally. For example, a friend informing you about a product has relatively low reach, compared to a billboard advertisement exposed to a large crowd. This assignment will focus on advertising and brand community, as marketing and non-marketing sources of influence.

### **2.4 THE PROCESSING OF VISUAL STIMULI IN ADVERTISING**

Research interest in attitudes towards advertising, specifically visual stimuli in advertising has been prominent (Bush, Smith, and Martin, 1999, p. 14; Bettman, 1986, p. 275). Childers and Houston’s (1984) study discovered visual stimuli yields stronger results under sensory processing conditions, than verbal stimuli significantly outperformed verbal cues under sensory processing conditions. This suggest that adver-

-tishments leveraging visual elements achieve superior recall and influence on the consumer. Young, Gillespie, and Otto (2019) confirmed this relationship, emphasising the critical role of visual content in shaping purchase intentions and serving as a distinctive source of influence.

## **2.5 BRAND COMMUNITY**

Fournier's (1998) concept of consumer-brand relationships provides a basis for understanding how brands can facilitate meaningful social connections. She highlights that brands serve as relationships partners, contributing to the consumers' sense of belonging (Ibid, pp. 344-346). By extending this framework to interactions within communities, consumer-to-consumer interactions are plausibly fostered. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) build on this framework by introducing the concept of brand communities, where consumers form social bonds around a shared admiration for a brand. These communities foster a shared consciousness and develop rituals and traditions (Ibid, pp. 418-422). For example, YouTubers playing video games creates a space for consumers to connect through shared experiences and discussions, therefore positioning itself as potent source of influence for said consumer.



### 3. APPLYING THE THEORIES

#### 3.1 APPLYING THEORIES OF MOTIVATION: NEEDS

The application of motivational theories, such as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, Ligas (2000) and Ariely and Norton (2009) warrants a novel exploration of consumers motivations behind engaging with and purchasing RDR2.

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs suggests that human motivation is driven by a series of needs, from basic physiological needs to more complex self-actualisation goals. In the case of RDR2, the game appeals to multiple levels of consumer needs. At the physiological level, consumers may seek the game simply for its entertainment value, fulfilling the basic need for leisure and escapism (Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters, 2018, p. 48). As a richly immersive game with detailed graphics and an expansive world, RDR2 satisfies the fundamental need for relaxation and engagement. Furthermore, RDR2 offers a sense of security through the control the consumer has within the game world, which could satisfy their safety needs. The high degree of agency it provides consumers to experience a form of stability through routine activities such as hunting, fishing, and exploring, establishes a sense of mastery and control for them (Maslow, 1943, p. 374).

While, consumers may be motivated to purchase RDR2 due to the technical offerings and gameplay features from a physiological and/or safety perspective, their motivation may emanate from purely social desires. For example, members of their social circle may be purchasing the game, meaning our consumer must also partake. This reinforces their self-concept, aligning with Ligas's (2000) idea of product-person congruity, where consumers are motivated by products that reinforce their identity, and in this case continued admission and acceptance within the social group.

RDR2 also attracts consumers that enjoy competing with others through 'Red Dead Online' (see Appendix C). Hence, one can argue consumers are motivated by esteem needs, as a way of reinforcing their identity as a serious gamer (Maslow, 1943). This aligns with Ariely and Norton's (2009) notion of conceptual consumption, since the game offers more than entertainment; it is a hedonic artefact that allows consumers to express their tastes and preferences in a way that aligns with their broader social identity.

The application of motivational theories explains how a consumer's decision to purchase RDR2 could unfold. For example, consumers seeking escapism and leisure may be driven by physiological needs, while another motivated by social belonging could purchase the game to maintain acceptance within their social circle. Similarly, esteem needs may influence a decision, as the game aligns with identity reinforcement, portraying the consumer as a serious gamer. Using frameworks such as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, Ligas' (2000) product-person congruity, and Ariely and Norton's (2009) conceptual consumption, this analysis demonstrates how RDR2 appeals to diverse consumer motivations and could shape consumer decision-making processes.

### **3.2 APPLYING THEORIES OF CONSUMERS SOCIAL INFLUENCE: ADVERTISING & BRAND COMMUNITIES**

As explored in Section 2.4, the importance and effect of visual stimuli in advertising is significant, and serves as a potent source of social influence towards consumer decision-making (Childers and Houston, 1984; Young, Gillespie and Otto, 2019). The extensive marketing campaign for RDR2 included OOH (Out-of-Home) advertisements on billboards and public transport, that were effectively deployed across international markets, as a way to raise awareness for the release of the game (see Image 3).



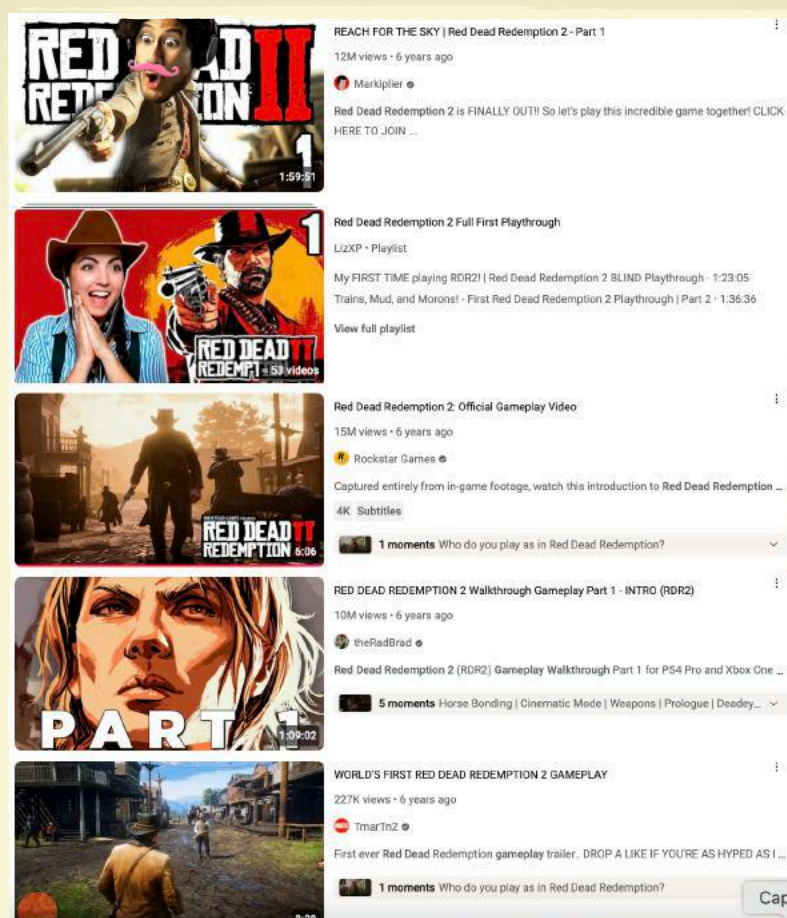
**Image 3.** OOH (Out-of-Home) Advertisements for Red Dead Redemption II across London, UK and Sydney, Australia (BUILDHOLLYWOOD, 2021; u/Edible\_Pie, 2018).

The advertisements convey a vibrant and eye-catching design creative a cohesive representation of the game's brand identity and thrill of the Wild-West experience, accompanied with the slogan 'OUTLAWS FOR LIFE'. Additionally, the release date of '26 October, 2018' is also present as a way of informing people of the release date. Chiefly speaking, the adverts lack a distinctive call-to-action, such as 'Pre-Order Now' or 'Learn more at [website address]'. If we refer to Childers and Houston (1994) and Young, Gillespie and Otto's (2019) work, this decision may have been purposeful in order to retain consumer attention on the vibrancy and aesthetic of the advertisement, as a way to cultivate a perception, argument or relentless interest towards

the game; in essence, to achieve recall. Hence, the prevalence of these advertisements and their interference within the consumers public space could assist their decision-making process as a source of influence.

This, however, is not the whole answer. While the advertisements for RDR2 are a visual spectacle, there are rival games releasing with their adverts prevalent through similar mediums, that can ultimately impact and influence consumer decision-making – a concern addressed in Section 1.2. For example, the marketing campaign for Assassin’s Creed Odyssey also included the use of vibrant OOH adverts (see Appendix D). The presence of both adverts can lead to a concept known as contextual interference (Kumar and Krishnan, 2004), which could impact consumer decision-making. Although, Kent and Allen (1994) as cited in Kumar and Krishnan (2004, p. 602), assert that familiar brands are not hurt by competitive interference. This suggests that while advertisements for Assassin’s Creed Odyssey may influence consumer decision-making, the familiarity of RDR2 and its dominant marketing presence could counterbalance this interference.

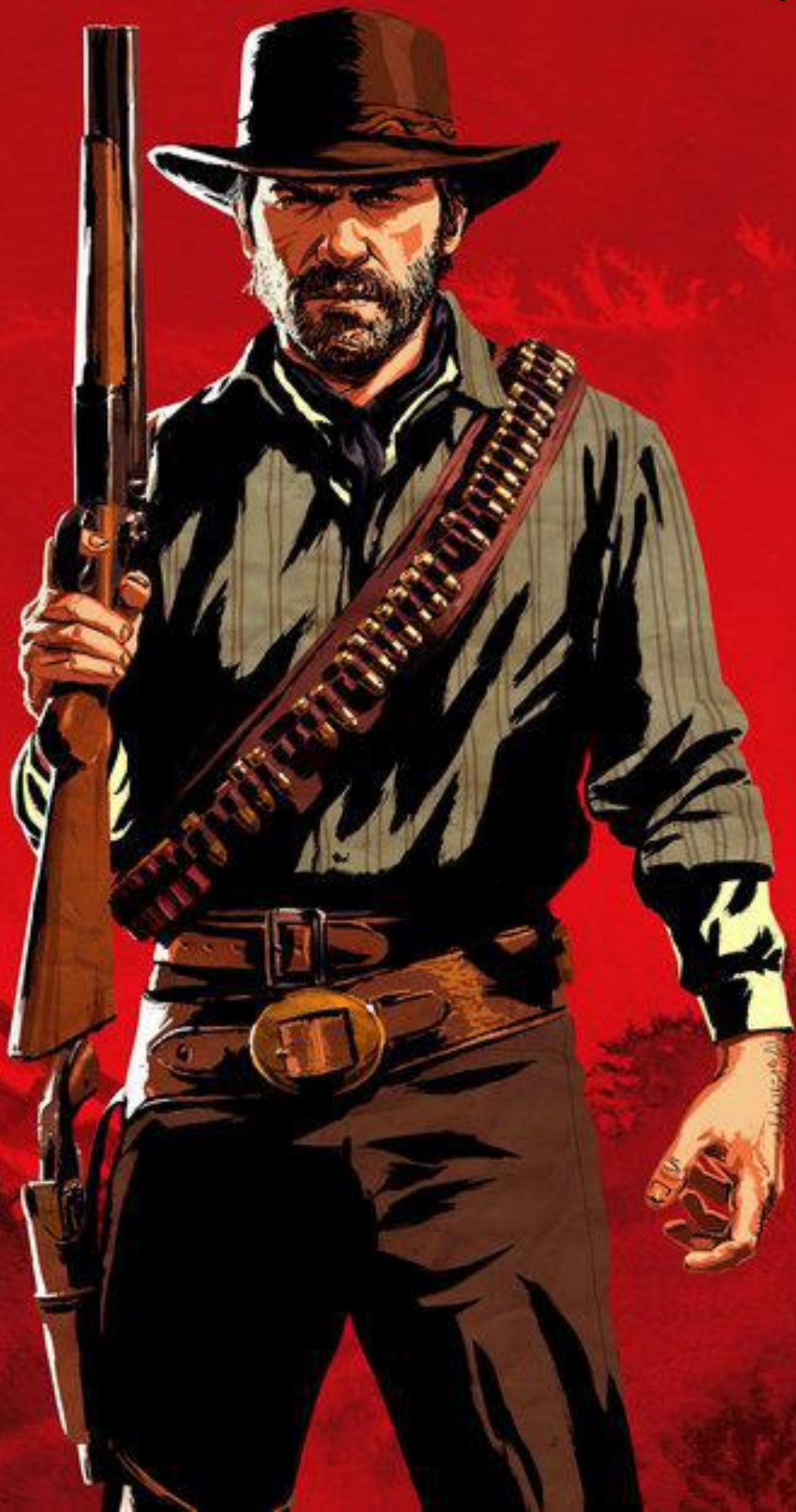
The evidence considered so far suggests that advertisements from rival games, namely Assassin’s Creed Odyssey, could impact consumer decision-making, unless there is a level of familiarity. Hence, this assignment positions brand community, as discussed in Section 2.5, as how this social influence conundrum can be challenged. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) concept of brand community is a significant part of RDR2 and a potent source of social influence. As highlighted in Image 4, players get together and interact with each other either through online fan pages or through creating YouTube videos, expressing their views and experiences with RDR2, and their excitement for the game prior to its release. This supports Fournier’s (1998) concept of consumer-brand relationships, as the RDR2 brand, is facilitating meaningful social connections, and thus assisting consumers in their consideration and therefore, potential purchase of the game.



**Image 4.** A sample screenshot of Red Dead Redemption 2 videos published on YouTube by content creators (Author).

Consequently, the application of theories and principles concerning different social sources can assist our understanding of how a consumer's decision to purchase RDR2 can be influenced, whether positively or negatively. The insights provided by Kumar and Krishnan (2004) are supported by the distinctive and captivating visuals of RDR2's campaign advertisements, which serve as an effective source of influence for consumers. Despite advertisements for other video games, such as Assassin's Creed Odyssey, may impact the consumer-decision making process, the level of familiarity and dominance provided by RDR2, in tandem with their strong brand community, mitigates the effects of contextual interference. Henceforth, this application and analysis showcases how consumer social influences can inform the decision-making processes for the purchase of RDR2.

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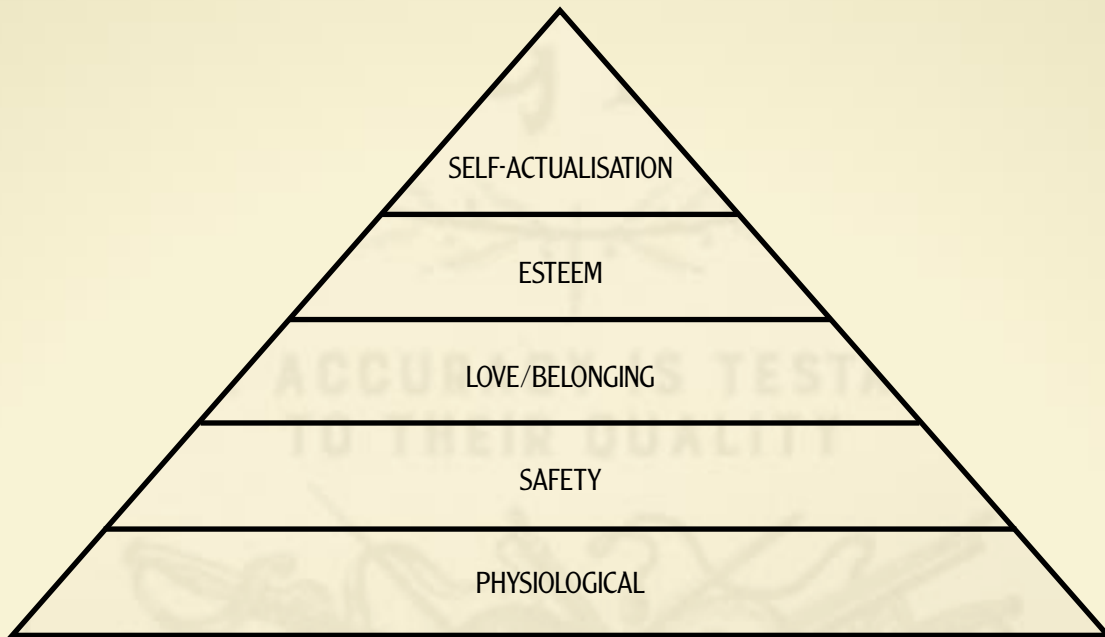


# APPENDICES



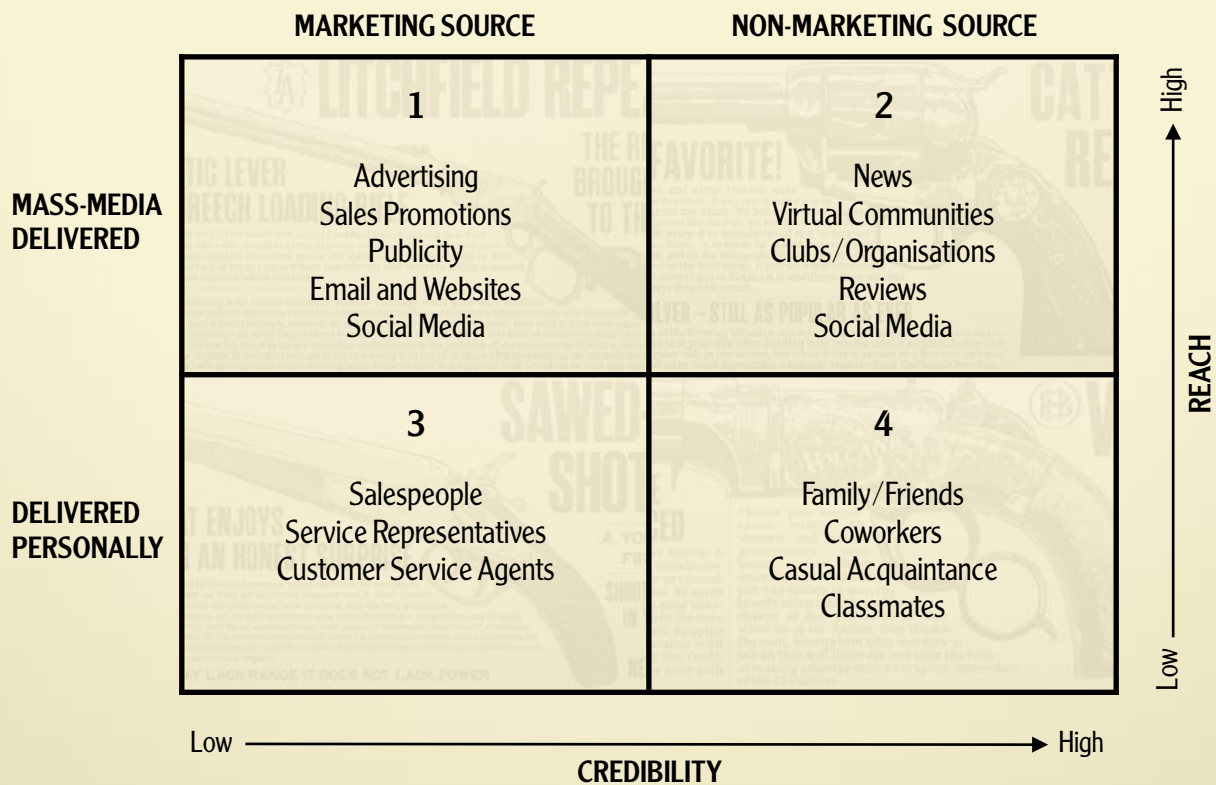
**APPENDIX A**

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs adapted from Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters (2018, p. 49, Exhibit 2.3).



**APPENDIX B**

Sources of influence adapted from Hoyer, MacInnis, and Pieters (2017, p. 295, Exhibit 11.2).



## APPENDIX C

Red Dead Online (Rockstar Games, 2024).



## APPENDIX D

OOH (Out-of-Home) advertisements as part of Assassin's Creed Odyssey global marketing campaign (Eye-D Creative, 2018).



