

## CRITICAL REFLECTION ON MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS: A NEW ERA PERSPECTIVE

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.58257/IJPREMS32081>

### ABSTRACT

This paper critically reflects on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model in the context of the modern era. Maslow's model, established in the mid-20th century, has been instrumental in understanding human motivation and behavior. However, the rapid changes in society, globalization, and evolving values necessitate a reexamination of this theory. The paper discusses how societal developments have reshaped the hierarchy of needs, emphasizing the influence of cultural, social, and economic factors on human desires. It also explores the shift from material satisfaction to a deeper pursuit of happiness and fulfillment, acknowledging factors like love, purpose, and control. To better understand contemporary needs, Philip Kotler's perspective on the transformation of wants into demands is introduced. The paper concludes by highlighting the continued relevance of Maslow's model as a theoretical tool while emphasizing the importance of critical evaluation and adaptation to the ever-changing needs of individuals in today's society.

**Keywords:** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, modern era, societal changes, cultural factors, happiness, Philip Kotler, critical evaluation, contemporary needs, adaptation, human behavior, motivation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS MODEL.

Since the mid-20th century, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has played a central role in the fields of psychology and management. This model is based on a fundamental assumption: that human needs are hierarchical, ranging from basic physiological needs such as food and water to safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and ultimately self-actualization. This model provides us with a foundational framework for understanding human behavior and motivation. However, with the rapid development of society and globalization, people's lifestyles, values, and needs are undergoing profound changes. In this context, it is necessary to reexamine and adjust traditional models of needs hierarchy (such as Maslow's theory). This theory asserts that unfilled needs are organized in a hierarchical structure and drive motivation in individual behavior. According to this hierarchy structure, each person should first satisfy their basic physiological needs (such as warmth and food) as well as safety and protection before gradually pursuing higher-level needs. Additionally, when considering improvements in management practices, it may be beneficial to consider novel or different perspectives on human needs proposed by other scholars (Nekula & Koob, 2021). Philip Kotler's perspective provides us with a new angle. He emphasizes the distinction between "needs" and "wants" and highlights that with purchasing power, "wants" can be transformed into "demands." For instance, he states, "An American needs food but wants a hamburger. When backed up by buying power, wants become demands." This signifies that in modern society, people's needs are no longer limited to basic physiological or survival necessities but are largely influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors (Mustafin et al., 2021). Furthermore, in modern society, the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment has transcended mere material satisfaction. True happiness may stem from deep connections with others, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, as well as recognition of one's own abilities and worth. For instance, for many individuals, factors such as having love, feeling needed, and having a sense of control may be more important than material wealth (JiaTong, 2021). In light of the aforementioned, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model provides us with a valuable theoretical tool. However, in the context of modern times, it is essential to critically evaluate and reflect upon this theory while taking into consideration real-life circumstances. Drawing on Philip Kotler's perspective can serve as an important reference point for better understanding the intricate needs and expectations of individuals in contemporary society.

### 2. BASIC COMPONENTS OF MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS MODEL

Since the mid-20th century, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs model has emerged as a fundamental theory in the fields of psychology and management. This model seeks to provide a systematic explanation for human behavioral motivation, grounded in a core premise: human needs are hierarchical and are satisfied in a specific order (Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs, n.d.). First and foremost, the most fundamental needs are physiological needs. These encompass basic survival requirements such as food, water, and sleep. Only when these fundamental needs are met do individuals pursue higher-level needs (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - Verywell Mind, n.d.).

Next come safety needs. Once an individual's physiological needs are satisfied, they seek a safe and stable environment, which includes physical safety, economic security, and family stability (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - Simply Psychology, n.d.).

Following this are social needs. Humans are social creatures, and we all have a need to establish relationships, experience love, and love others. This level of needs fulfills our desires for interaction and relationship-building (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Uses and criticisms - Medical News Today, n.d.).

Moving upward, we encounter esteem needs, encompassing self-esteem and the esteem of others. After an individual's social needs are met, they aspire to higher-level needs related to recognition and respect, including achievements, success in their careers, and acknowledgment by others (Maslow's hierarchy of needs: Uses and criticisms - Medical News Today, n.d.).

The highest-level need is self-actualization. This represents an ongoing process where individuals strive to maximize their potential, achieve their ideals, and fulfill their aspirations (Self-Actualization: What It Is and How to Achieve It - Healthline, n.d.).

It's worth noting that while Maslow proposed these five levels of needs, he also acknowledged that different cultures and individuals may have varying hierarchies of needs and different sequences of satisfaction. Furthermore, as society evolves and changes, people's needs and values also undergo continuous transformation, which can impact the hierarchy and order of needs (Social change, cultural evolution, and human development, n.d.).

In summary, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model provides us with a framework for understanding human behavior and motivation. However, when applying this model, we must also consider the influence of cultural, societal, and individual differences, as well as the changes in needs and values.

### 3. CHANGING NEEDS IN THE MODERN ERA

With the rapid development of society and globalization, people's lifestyles, values, and needs are undergoing profound changes. In this context, the traditional Maslow's hierarchy of needs model may require reevaluation and adjustment.

Firstly, in modern society, needs are no longer solely based on physiological or survival fundamentals. For instance, as noted by marketing expert Philip Kotler, "An American needs food but wants a hamburger. When backed up by buying power, wants become demands." This implies that in modern society, people's needs are influenced not only by physiological or survival factors but also significantly by cultural, social, and economic factors. This shift has turned "wants" into "demands" to some extent, and these demands are influenced by purchasing power (Consumption, consumer culture, and consumer society - ResearchGate, n.d.).

Secondly, in modern society, people's pursuit of happiness and fulfillment has surpassed mere material satisfaction. True happiness may stem from deep connections with others, understanding the meaning and purpose of life, and recognizing one's abilities and worth. For many individuals, factors such as "being loved," "being needed," and a sense of control may be more important than material wealth. This altered understanding of happiness has led to changes in the hierarchy of needs, emphasizing not just material satisfaction but also spiritual fulfillment and personal growth.

Moreover, the concept of freedom in modern society has also influenced people's needs. Freedom is no longer just an abstract concept; it is closely linked to the sense of control. People now seek not only external freedom but also internal freedom – the ability to do what they should and restrain from what they shouldn't. This nuanced understanding of freedom has made people's needs more complex and diverse.

Furthermore, relationships in modern society have also impacted people's needs. People are no longer satisfied with superficial social interactions; they seek deep connections and meaningful communication. This depth in relationships has made people's social needs richer and more diverse.

In conclusion, the changes in needs in the modern era necessitate a reevaluation and adjustment of Maslow's hierarchy of needs model. These changes involve not only alterations in the hierarchy and content of needs but also variations in the depth and breadth of needs. In this context, it is essential to critically assess and reflect upon Maslow's model in conjunction with real-world circumstances.

### 4. CRITIQUES AND REFLECTIONS ON THE MODEL

Since Abraham Maslow introduced his renowned hierarchy of needs model in the mid-20th century, this model has found widespread application in psychology, management, and various other fields. However, as times have evolved and society has undergone changes, criticisms and reflections on this model have grown.

Firstly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs model is built on a core premise: that human needs are hierarchical and satisfied in a specific order. However, this premise has been challenged in modern society. For example, in different cultural

and social contexts, the hierarchy and sequence of needs may differ. In some cultures, social needs or esteem needs may take precedence over physiological needs. Consequently, treating the hierarchy of needs model as a universally applicable framework may have limitations.

Secondly, Maslow's model oversimplifies the description of needs. In modern society, people have needs that are far more complex and diverse than the five levels proposed by Maslow. For instance, the distinction between "needs" and "wants" and how "wants" can transform into "needs" with purchasing power, as pointed out by marketing expert Philip Kotler, are aspects not covered in the Maslow model. Additionally, with technological advancements and the advent of the information age, people's needs are constantly evolving and changing.

Furthermore, Maslow's model places excessive emphasis on an individual's internal needs while overlooking the influence of external factors in shaping needs. Factors such as social structure, cultural backgrounds, and economic conditions can significantly impact an individual's needs. In certain contexts, external circumstances may outweigh an individual's internal needs in importance.

Additionally, Maslow's model presents the satisfaction of needs as a linear and fixed process. However, in reality, the satisfaction of needs for individuals can be a dynamic and nonlinear process. For example, individuals pursuing self-actualization may reassess and adjust their other needs along the way.

In summary, while Maslow's hierarchy of needs model provides a valuable theoretical tool, it requires critical assessment and reflection in the context of the modern era. This is not only to enhance our understanding and explanation of human behavior and motivation but also to adapt to the complex and ever-changing needs of modern society.

## 5. MODERN ALTERNATIVE THEORIES AND MODELS

As society, culture, and technology rapidly evolve, the traditional Maslow's hierarchy of needs model appears somewhat inadequate in certain aspects. Consequently, scholars have proposed various modern alternative theories and models to better explain and understand human needs and motivations.

Firstly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan, emphasizes three fundamental psychological needs in humans: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three needs are considered essential for human growth, development, and well-being. Unlike the Maslow model, SDT not only focuses on the hierarchy of needs but also underscores the quality and source of needs. For example, external motivation may satisfy certain needs, but internal motivation is often more conducive to long-term personal growth and development (Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation ..., n.d.).

Secondly, ERG Theory, proposed by Alderfer, simplifies and revises Maslow's model. ERG Theory categorizes needs into three levels: existence, relatedness, and growth. Unlike Maslow's model, ERG Theory suggests that different levels of needs can coexist simultaneously, rather than being strictly satisfied in a particular sequence (Alderfer's 'ERG Theory' - Zhihu - Zhihu Column, n.d.).

Furthermore, McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory highlights three basic human needs: achievement, power, and affiliation. These needs partially overlap with certain levels in Maslow's model but place a stronger emphasis on the influence of an individual's social and cultural background on their needs. For instance, different cultures may prioritize different needs, with some cultures emphasizing power while others stress affiliation (McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory - MBA Knowledge Base Encyclopedia, n.d.).

Moreover, in modern society, with technological advancements and the advent of the information age, people have developed new types of needs. For instance, information and connectivity needs have become increasingly significant in today's world. People are not merely content with fulfilling basic physiological and safety needs; they also seek connections with others and the acquisition and sharing of information. These needs are not explicitly addressed in Maslow's model but are particularly crucial in contemporary society.

In conclusion, while Maslow's hierarchy of needs model has provided a valuable theoretical framework, numerous modern alternative theories and models offer a more comprehensive and precise perspective. These theories and models do not solely focus on the hierarchy of needs but also consider the quality, source, and context of needs, providing new insights and directions for understanding and explaining human behavior and motivation.

## 6. THEORETICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MASLOW THEORY MODEL

In the field of social science and psychology research, constructing and applying models is crucial for understanding and explaining phenomena. This article delves into a specific model, which employs the elements M, D, S, and C to represent the core content of the study and describes their relationships in detail.

### 6.1 Core Components of the Model

M: Model - In this article, M represents Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model. This is a classic theory in psychology used to systematically explain human behavior motivation. It is based on a core premise: human needs are hierarchical, and these needs are satisfied in a certain order (Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs Theory - MBA Toolbox, n.d).

Firstly, the most fundamental needs are physiological needs. These include basic survival needs such as food, water, and shelter. Once these physiological needs are met, individuals move on to the next level.

D: Needs - The variable D signifies the array of human needs. These encompass physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs, in accordance with Maslow's model (Maslow, 1943).

S: Society - The symbol S denotes the broader societal context in which individuals reside. It encompasses various factors, including cultural, economic, and technological aspects of society. This societal environment has a substantial influence on an individual's needs and behavior (Hofstede, 1984).

C: Change - C is a representation of the dynamic nature of human needs within the framework of societal development and transformation. It reflects the idea that human needs evolve and adapt in response to changes in the societal context (Maslow, 1943).

### 6.2 Description of Model Relationships

M(D) - This equation signifies the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model (M) to describe and categorize human needs (D). The model establishes a systematic framework for understanding why individuals possess specific needs and how these needs impact their actions and decisions (Maslow, 1943).

S→C(D) - This notation indicates the causal relationship between the societal context (S) and changes in human needs (C(D)). It highlights that alterations in society, whether in culture, technology, or economy, have a direct impact on the types and prioritization of human needs. Consequently, needs undergo transformation within different societal settings (Hofstede, 1984).

### 6.3 Application and Significance of the Model

The application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model (M) plays a vital role in comprehending the fundamental drivers of human behavior and motivation. By classifying and prioritizing needs, it offers insights into why individuals pursue particular goals and engage in specific actions (Maslow, 1943).

Nevertheless, in the context of societal development and transformation (S), the model emphasizes the need for flexibility and adaptability. As society changes, individuals' needs (D) also change in response (C). This dynamic perspective enables a more comprehensive understanding of human behavior and motivation, acknowledging the influence of societal factors (Hofstede, 1984).

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND CRITIQUES OF THE MODEL

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model (M) has faced various critiques and limitations over time. Firstly, the model's assumption of a universal, hierarchical sequence of needs has been challenged. Different cultures and societal contexts may prioritize needs differently, and some individuals may bypass certain levels of needs or experience them simultaneously (Chirkov et al., 2003).

Secondly, the model oversimplifies the complexity of human needs. In modern society, needs encompass a wide range of factors beyond the five basic levels proposed by Maslow. This oversimplification may not fully capture the intricacies of contemporary human needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Moreover, Maslow's model places a strong emphasis on individual internal needs and largely neglects the external environmental factors that influence these needs. Socioeconomic conditions, cultural backgrounds, and societal structures can significantly impact an individual's needs and priorities (Hofstede, 1984).

Additionally, the linear and rigid nature of the model may not accurately reflect the dynamic and interconnected nature of human needs. People's pursuit of self-actualization, for instance, can influence and reshape their lower-level needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In summary, while Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model (M) serves as a foundational framework, it requires critical examination and adaptation to the complexities of modern society (C). Recognizing the limitations and considering the impact of societal factors is essential for gaining a more nuanced understanding of human behavior and motivation (Chirkov et al., 2003).



## 8. MODERN ALTERNATIVE THEORIES AND MODELS

In response to the evolving nature of human needs and motivations in contemporary society, several modern alternative theories and models have emerged, offering more nuanced perspectives. Self-Determination Theory (SDT): SDT, developed by Deci and Ryan, focuses on the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs. It emphasizes that individuals are most motivated when their actions align with their autonomous choices, abilities, and social connections (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

ERG Theory: Alderfer's ERG Theory categorizes needs into three levels: existence, relatedness, and growth. Unlike Maslow's strict hierarchy, ERG Theory allows for the simultaneous pursuit of multiple needs and acknowledges that individuals may regress to lower-level needs if higher-level needs remain unfulfilled (Alderfer, 1972).

Self-Expansion Theory: Developed by Aron and Aron, this theory posits that individuals are motivated to seek experiences and relationships that expand their sense of self. It suggests that people are inherently driven to explore and grow through connections with others and novel experiences (Aron & Aron, 1986).

Positive Psychology: Positive psychology, pioneered by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, focuses on human strengths and well-being. It emphasizes the pursuit of happiness, meaning, and flourishing in life and emphasizes the importance of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Cultural Theories: Various cultural theories, such as Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory and Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values, recognize the influence of culture on human values, priorities, and needs. These theories highlight how cultural factors shape individual motivations and behaviors (Hofstede, 1984; Schwartz, 1994).

These modern alternative theories and models offer diverse perspectives on human needs and motivations, accounting for cultural, contextual, and individual variations. They provide valuable insights for researchers and practitioners seeking a deeper understanding of human behavior and well-being in the complex landscape of modern society.

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