

Assess the contribution of positivist to our understanding of methodology

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Positivism is a key concept in Sociology. It is also known to some as the scientist ideology. It is essentially the belief that the social world can be studied in the identical way that one may study the natural world, so it can be studied scientifically. The main opposition to this concept of sociology is the interpretive approach. They tend to stress the differences between the natural world and the social world. Positivism came about during the 1800s, during the industrial revolution, the concept corresponds with the era it was established in. In the 1800s, philosophy was considered useless and science was considered to be the solution to all of the world's problems, it was accepted into society and not shunned away. Positivism was started by Auguste Comte who is regarded to be the first true sociologist, and was also studied and continued by his student Emile Durkheim. Auguste Comte was born on January 17th 1798. He was born in France. He was best-known for the theory that, society has gone through three stages: Theological, this is basically based on religion. Theories are explained in terms of God. The next is; Metaphysical; this is based upon forces that change the world. And the third is scientific (positive) this is based upon science and maths. Comte believed that these laws could be applied to society as a whole, and that his method could be used to analyse and interpret society in to extreme detail and would lead to the better understanding of society. Methodology establishes ways in which data can be obtained about any given subject. Different forms can be taken such as questionnaires. These can be examined in detail to see if there is a pattern in society. Scientific methods are used by positivists. These methods lead to accurate and precise predictions.

Positivists use quantitative data to produce outcomes. Quantitative research is the scientific investigation of properties, and is always approached scientifically, hence the fact that it goes hand in hand with positivist research. Positivists believe that in order to gain an accurate outcome from any test, you should only study what you can see, and only what is tangible. For example, you can study one's emotions or reactions but not one's motive. They also believe that external stimuli are the factors that affect human behaviour opposed to internal stimuli which is what goes on in one's mind. They look for patterns and trends, and seek laws e. g. the relationship between crime and law. Through these methods, positivists can produce universal laws that can be applied to the whole of mankind. In conclusion, positivism goes hand in hand with science. It aids us in understanding of methodology. In order to fully understand the sociological method, we need to understand their point of view and their understanding of sociology. The outcome of these methods depends on the individual sociologist.