

Disadvantages, advantages and assumptions of the positivist essay sample

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“ Positivists view the use of scientific methods of research as desirable or preferable and are critical sociologists that use subjective or unobservable mental states.” The positivist methodology came from the early sociologist, Auguste Comte. He maintained that the application of the methods and assumptions of the natural sciences of the “ positive sciences” of society. From this rational came the tenants of positivism or the positivist perspective.

Some characteristics of this type of methodology are:-

- The evolution of society followed a set of laws. These laws were governed by principles of cause and effect.
- Human behaviour, like the behaviour of matter can be objectively measured.
- The behaviour that is observed can therefore, be analyzed and examined in order to create theories.

Positivists also prefer “ correlation” as a key method of analyzing sociological research. This means that they preferred to look at social facts before they made their assumptions. They believed that it is therefore possible for one phenomena to affect the actions of another.

The assumptions of interpretive methods in sociological research are :

- The sampling size has to be smaller in order to allow easier, more in-depth study of the subjects.

- Interviews are also very much preferred among this methodology because they allow a better understanding of the actor's nature (ontology). It is flexible and can often be used to ask people about their attitudes, etc.
- The use of participant observation, and ethnography is critical for an interpretivist's understanding and analysis of the actions of a social group.
- Symbolic interactionism comes into play as well. Individuals react according to symbols that are around them. These acts are defined as social acts which are the results of subjective meanings or interpretation and therefore cannot be objectively analyzed.

The main disadvantage of the positivist method of research is the fact that subjects being objectively studied may not be acting as they usually do. Hence, the researcher may collect wrong information. However, this can be an advantage because if the person being studied doesn't know he/she is being looked at, the researcher can collect and provide very important and reliable data. Another advantage is the fact that a wider range of data is available to the researcher.

The interpretive method can be a disadvantage however because the sampling size is smaller. A very small sample can sometimes be very unreliable because it is only a very small portion of a very large population. Not everything can be objectively measured. Participant observation and ethnography (the study of the way of life) are very important to interpretive research. They can be useful because they assist the researcher in getting closer to the subjects being studied without actually being noticed. It works

even better if the type of participant observation is covert. The researcher becomes an actual integral part of the study.

In conclusion, it is evident that all types of research and methodologies may have faults, which make them seem impossible, until you actually look at the good in them.