Social facts are associated with certain characteristics that

Durkheim considers crucial to the understanding of material and

non-material categories. They are:-

**a)**

**Externality:**

Social facts exist outside the consciousness of the individual. Their

existence is external to the individuals. For example, domestic or

civic or contractual obligations are defined, externally to the

individual, in laws and customs. Religious beliefs and practices exist

outside and prior to the individual. An individual takes birth in a

society and leaves it however; social facts are already given in

society. For example language continues to function independently

of any single individual.

**b)**

**Constraint:**

Social facts exercise a constraint on individuals. Social fact is

recognized because it forces itself on the individual. For example, the

institutions of law, education, beliefs, etc. are already given to

everyone from without. They are commanding and obligatory for all.

Such a phenomenon is typically social because its basis, its subject is

the group as a whole and not one individual in particular

**c) Independence and d) Generality**

A social fact is that which has more or less a general characteristic in

a society. Also it is independent of the personal features o

individuals or universal attributes of human nature. Examples are the

beliefs, feelings and practices of the group taken collectively.

In order to approach his concept of social facts, Durkheim laid out

some rules for their general understanding. They are:-

Social Facts should be treated as ‘things’. Social facts are real.

Thus, the belief systems, customs and institutions of society, the

facts of the social world, should be considered as things in the

same way as the objects and events of the natural world. As such

they can be directly observed and objectively measured