

Understanding the Horn of Africa

How do we know what we know? Verifying 'Facts'

Objective: Explore concepts and methods in the verification of 'facts'.

While the need and methods to verify 'facts' did not emerge with the advent of the Internet, the amount of readily accessible information has vastly multiplied. A further issue is whether facts constitute knowledge or if more is required to be sure of something. With many sources, multiple perspectives, and, in some cases, significant contestation, 'facts' are not always so simple to ascertain. Further, not everything is documented digitally or at all. These concerns, of course, are central to philosophy and epistemology, subjects well beyond this resource. Here we provide a few sources that can help educators and students work through some of these issues.

These resources complement the [Understanding the Horn](#) lessons on "Fun Facts" and "Popular Culture, Global Knowledge and Kenya's First Internet Meme". Other related resources on this site include:

- [Library Bibliographic Research Tools](#)
- [Literature Review Assignment Guide](#)
- [Using Wikipedia in the Classroom](#)

A Few Concepts

Have the students explore these concepts by looking up and discussing the following entries either in the [Oxford Dictionary of Social Science](#), [Wikipedia](#) or other online sources. What other concepts emerge as salient in this discussion?

[deconstruction](#)
[empiricism](#)
[epistemology](#)
[fact-value distinction](#)

[knowledge](#)
[intersubjectivity](#)
[objectivity](#)
[positivism](#)

All links above, except 'knowledge', are from the [Dictionary of the Social Sciences](#), edited by Craig J Calhoun. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Online Version, 2012. "Knowledge" link is from [Wikipedia](#).

Explore a 'fact' from the Horn of Africa that has turned out to be not so factual:

The population of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya

Long held to be the largest slum in East Africa, Kibera, a community centrally located in Nairobi has attracted much attention from the international community. Many estimated the population to be from 1 to 1.5 million in Kibera. Yet the [2009 Kenyan census](#) counted only 170,000 residents which matched the result of other rigorous efforts to measure the population, including the [Map Kibera Project](#) and a GIS project by the [French Institute for Research in Africa](#) (IFRA) Nairobi and Keyobs, a Belgian company ([Desgropes and Taupin, 2011](#)).



Activities: Read the materials below. Do some searches on the population size of Kibera to see what various sites report. Discuss why widely used estimates have been so wrong. What is the value of getting the numbers right?

- Karanja, Muchiri. 2010. “Myth Shattered: Kibera Numbers Fail to Add Up.” *Daily Nation*, September 3, sec. News. <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/Kibera-numbers-fail-to-add-up/-/1056/1003404/-/2lmpq/-/index.html>.
- Desgroppes, Amélie, and Sophie Taupin. “Kibera: The Biggest Slum in Africa?” *Les Cahiers de l’Afrique de l’Est* 44 (2011): 23–34. http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/75/18/33/PDF/Amelie_Desgroppes_Sophie_Taupin_-_KIBERA.pdf
- Ekdale, Brian. “What’s in a Name (and a Number)?” *Thoughts on Global Media and Culture...and a Few Random Things...*, September 5, 2010. <http://www.brianekdale.com/?p=107>.
- Robbins, Martin. “The Missing Millions of Kibera.” *The Guardian*, August 1, 2012, sec. Science. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/the-lay-scientist/2012/aug/01/africa-propaganda-kibera>.

Further Resources on ‘fact-checking’

Doyne, Shannon, and Holly Epstein Ojalvo. “Check It Out: Verifying Information and Sources in News Coverage.” A Lesson Plan from *The New York Times: The Learning Network*, February 2, 2012, sec. Teaching and Learning. <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/02/check-it-out-verifying-information-and-sources-in-news-coverage/>.

Hermida, Alfred. “Tweets and Truth.” *Journalism Practice* 6, no. 5–6 (2012): 659–668. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2012.667269>.

Jones, Steve, Camille Johnson-Yale, Sarah Millermaier, and Francisco Seoane Pérez. “Academic Work, the Internet and U.S. College Students.” *The Internet and Higher Education* 11, no. 3–4 (2008): 165–177. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2008.07.001>.

Metzger, Miriam J, Andrew J Flanagin, and Lara Zwarun. “College Student Web Use, Perceptions of Information Credibility, and Verification Behavior.” *Computers & Education* 41, no. 3 (November 2003): 271–290. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0360-1315\(03\)00049-6](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0360-1315(03)00049-6).

Metzger, Miriam J. “Making Sense of Credibility on the Web: Models for Evaluating Online Information and Recommendations for Future Research.” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, no. 13 (2007): 2078–2091. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/asi.20672>.

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