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# Truth in social marketing

## Applying Truth Frameworks to the Strategic Evaluation of Social Marketing Campaigns

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## The CAP Code

The UK Code of Non-broadcast  
Advertising, Sales Promotion and  
Direct Marketing

### Advertising and Marketing Communication Practice

# Consolidated ICC Code

“All marketing communications should be legal, decent, honest and truthful (ICC, 2011, p. 6).”

“The central principle for all marketing communications is that they should be legal, decent, honest and truthful (ASA, 2014, p. 11).”



## Aim

- To develop a theory of propositional truth in marketing and apply it to **behavioural claims** in social marketing
- To demonstrate how truth analyses of behavioural claims have strategic implications for the design of social marketing campaigns

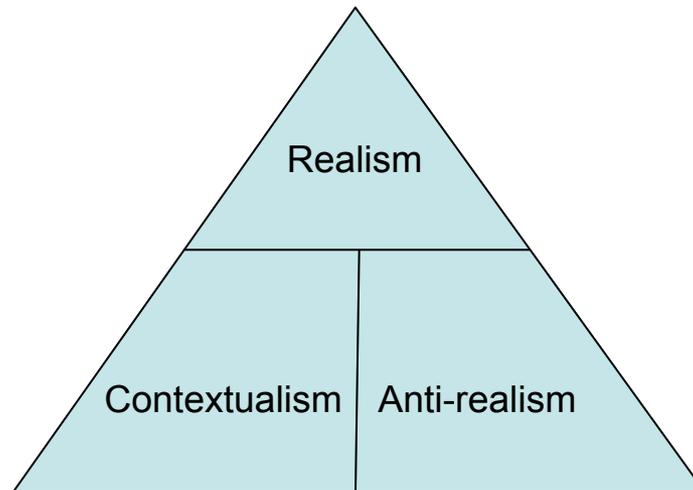




## Truth framework

### **Correspondence**

*What is the relation between the claim and external facts?*



### **Pragmatic**

*Does the campaign facilitate relevant courses of action?*

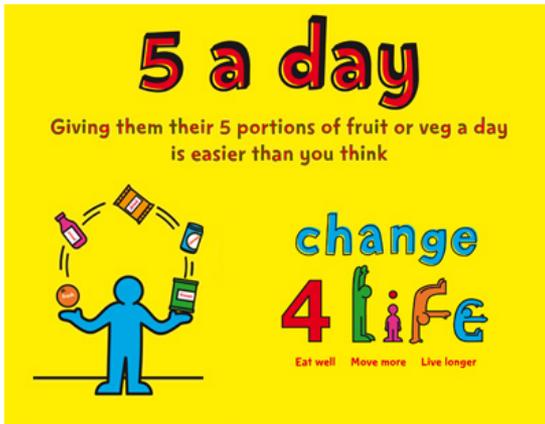
### **Coherence**

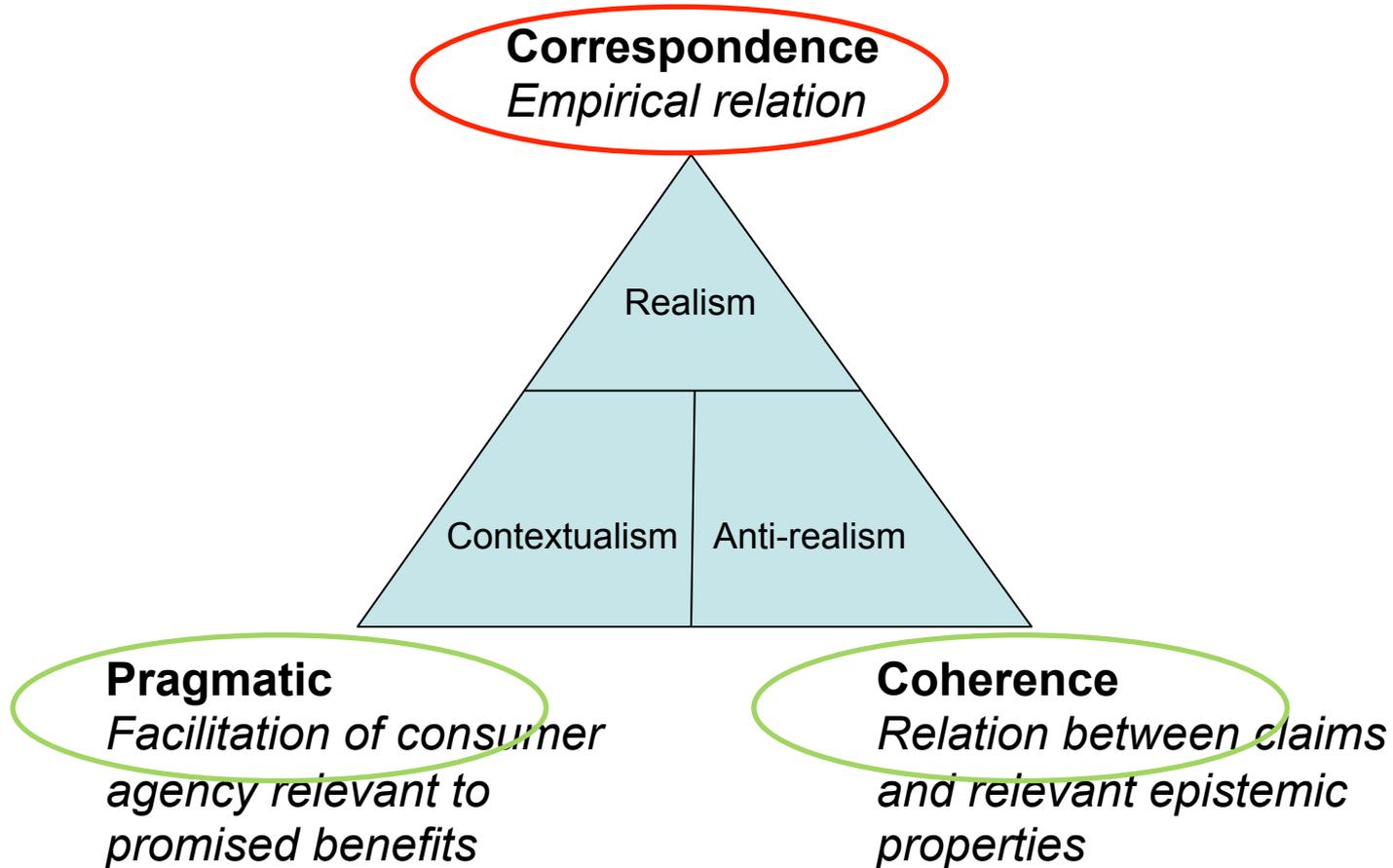
*Does the claim cohere with relevant epistemic properties?*



## The correspondence theory of truth

- A claim is true insofar as it corresponds with external facts (empirical relation)
  - If a social marketer makes the claim that P, then there is a given possible state of affairs, x, in the objective world, W, such that P is true insofar as  $W(x)$  is the case







## Strategic question

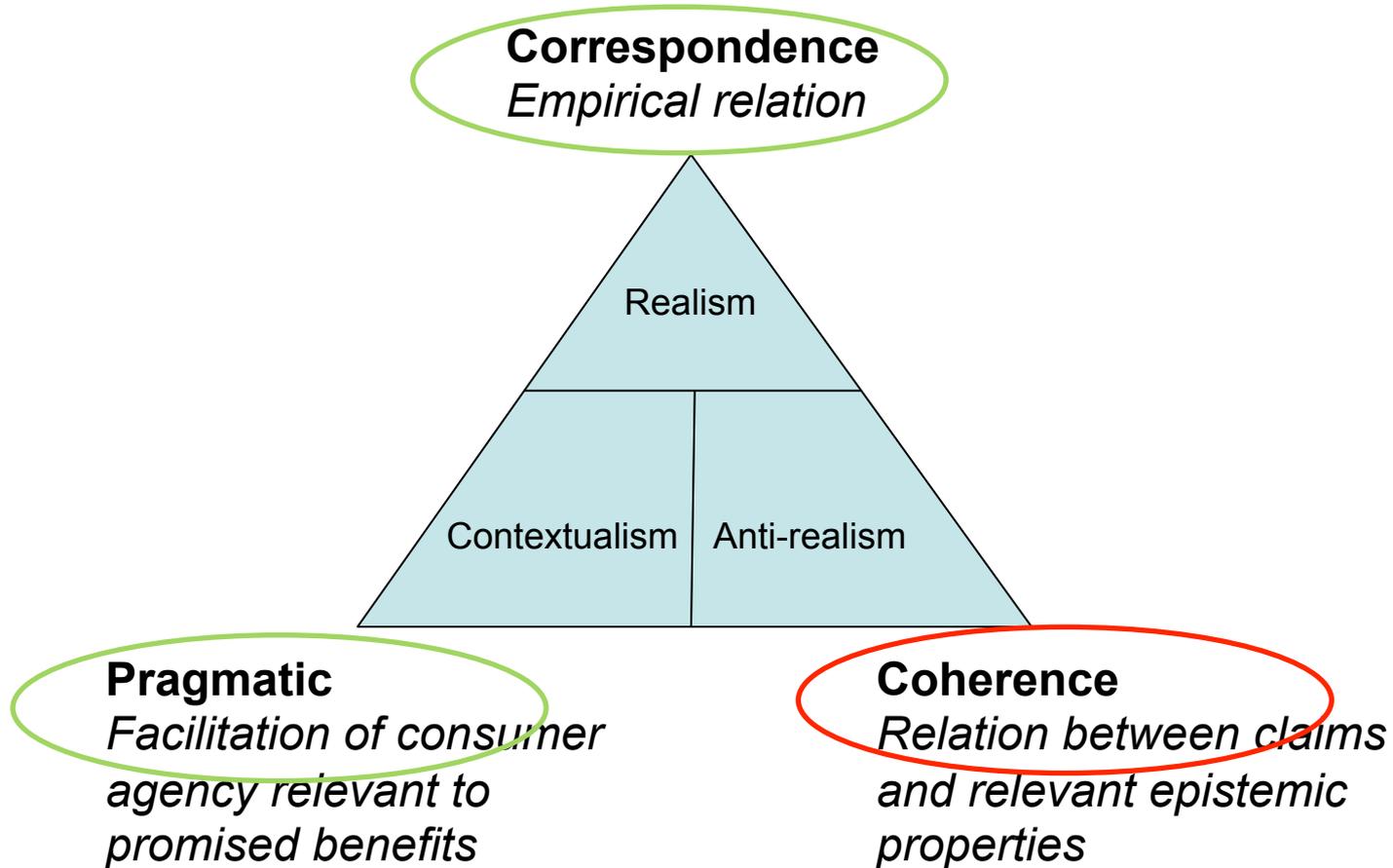
- Do we know the relevant, factual evidence base and does our campaign design clearly reflect key insights from this evidence base?



## The coherence theory of truth

- A claim is true insofar as it coheres with other relevant epistemic properties in a specified network
  - Brand universe, brand values, brand image, brand promise
  - Public policy, public perceptions







## Strategic question

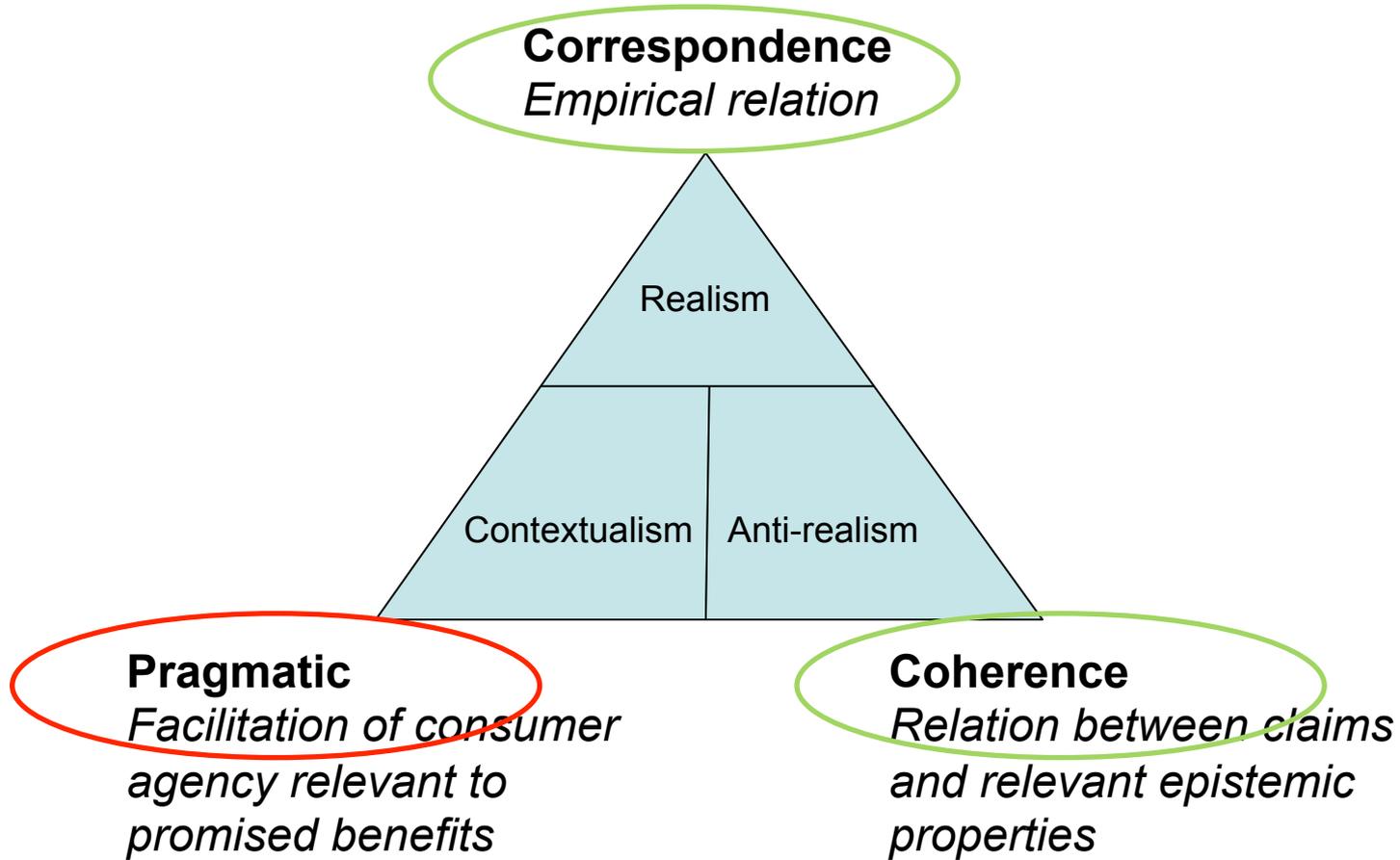
- Is our core message communicated consistently across all channels and does the intended behavioural change cohere with the wider policy context and general courses of actions of relevant institutions?



## The pragmatic theory of truth

- A claim is true insofar as holding and acting on the claim over time is useful to the agent and the brand facilitates courses of actions that are conducive to realising the claim







## Strategic question

- Is the intended behavioural change useful to the agent in the long term and does our campaign substantially facilitate relevant courses of action that will bring about the behavioural change?



## Conclusion

- It is possible to test the truthfulness of common behavioural claims against three theories of truth
- Truth analyses of marketing claims prompt strategic evaluations (evidence-base, consistency, context/agency) that should inform intervention design



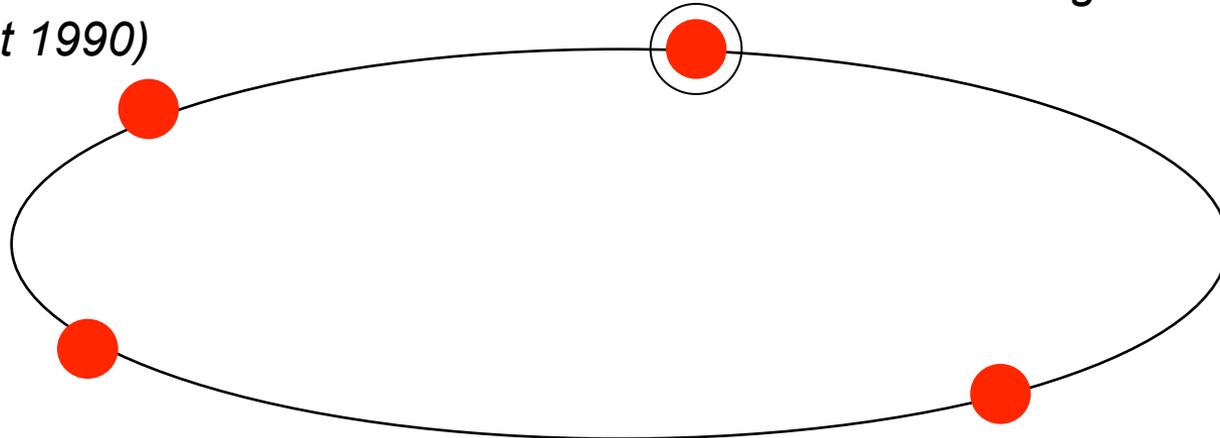
# Appendix



## State of the art

**Truth in marketing science**  
*Constructivism/realism*  
(e.g., Hunt 1990)

**Truth in marketing as a propositional concept**  
*What is it for a marketing claim to be truthful?*



**Truth in marketing as political/ ideological construct**  
*Consumer constructed world without any external reality (e.g., Baudrillard 1994, 1998)*

**Truth in marketing as moral property**  
*Do marketers have moral obligations to be truthful? (e.g., Jackson 1990)*



## Contribution

- First systematic attempt at a theory of propositional truth in (social) marketing
- Synthesis of three propositional theories of truth applied to a new domain
  - **Correspondence**
  - **Coherence**
  - **Pragmatic**



## Behavioural change is (still) key

- “Social Marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches **to influence behaviours** that benefit **individuals and communities** for **the greater social good.**” (ISMA/ESMA/AASM, 2013)

**Annexe 2: Summary of Social Marketing principles rated as ‘essential’ or ‘important’ by 167 respondents to the iSMA and ESMA Key Principles & Definitions Survey**

KP ID	Description	Essential + Important (% total responses)	Rank
KP 2	Set and measure behavioural objectives	83	1
KP 3	Uses audience insight and research	81	2
KP 1	Focus on the production of social good	79	3



## Behavioural claim in social marketing

- A proposition that makes an assumption regarding the desirability of a given course of action
  - The proposition encourages a target audience to adopt or refrain from a given course of action
  - A should do or refrain from X, because of Y

