

Claims Need States

A proposal for preserving a claim's source position, verification state, date and distributed surfaces as part of its journalistic meaning.

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A claim's meaning is not only what it says. It also depends on who says it, what has been verified, when that state applied, and whether that state survives wherever the claim is displayed.

In late July 2023, researchers posted preprints claiming that LK-99 was a room-temperature, ambient-pressure superconductor.

If true, it would have been extraordinary.

At that moment, responsible reporting could say:

Researchers claim LK-99 is a room-temperature superconductor.

That is not the same sentence as:

LK-99 is a room-temperature superconductor.

The difference is not cosmetic. It is the state of the claim.

Then the verification record changed.

Independent groups tried to reproduce the reported effect. Early replication attempts failed to confirm room-temperature superconductivity. By mid-August, Nature reported that replication and materials analysis had produced ordinary, non-superconducting explanations for the effects that had attracted attention. In September, a Nature Physics editorial said the emerging consensus was that LK-99 had no zero-resistance state — while noting that the original authors still stood by their results.

So what was the state of the claim?

Not simply true.

Not simply false.

Not even simply disputed.

The original authors maintained it.

Independent replication had not reproduced it.

The broader verification record had moved strongly against it.

The historical record still correctly showed that the claim had been made.

A claim does not have one state.

Sources have positions.

Verification has a state.

Both have dates.

A claim is more than a sentence

Journalism already knows how to attribute.

"Police say."

"Researchers claim."

"The company denies."

"The court found."

Those phrases are not decoration. They tell the reader what kind of statement they are looking at.

But digital publishing often treats the sentence itself as the durable object.

That is where information gets lost.

Consider:

LK-99 is a room-temperature, ambient-pressure superconductor.

Several different questions sit behind that proposition.

Who asserts it?

Has it been independently reproduced?

What evidence supports or contradicts it?

Has the source changed position?

What was known when the article was published?

No single label answers all of those questions.

A source can maintain a claim after independent verification turns against it. A court can make a finding under a specific legal standard. A regulator can reach a conclusion within a statutory scope. A scientific consensus can strengthen as replication accumulates.

These findings can carry great weight without becoming interchangeable.

The newsroom should preserve what has been verified, not manufacture a universal truth label.

Preserve what was published. Update what is known.

Suppose an article published in July 2023 accurately said:

Researchers claim LK-99 is a room-temperature superconductor.

Later evidence does not make that historical reporting event false.

Researchers did make the claim.

But a reader opening the article months later should not be left with only the July state.

Historical integrity and current meaning are different requirements.

The historical record should preserve what was published.

The current presentation should preserve what happened next.

That might mean an update note, a short sentence near the top, or some other compact current-state treatment.

The exact interface is a design question.

The standard is simpler:

Preserve what was published. Update what is known.

Do not silently rewrite the past.

Do not freeze an old verification state forever either.

The article is not the only place where the claim lives

A claim does not stay inside the article.

It moves:

source -> notes -> body -> headline -> push -> social card -> search result -> archive -> later update.

At every step, meaning can change.

Imagine the body says:

Police allege that X happened.

and the headline says:

X happened.

The underlying event may be the same, but the attribution has vanished. The presentation has moved from allegation to assertion.

A different failure happens when the proposition itself becomes stronger.

For example:

Evidence suggests X may have contributed to Y.

becomes:

X caused Y.

One transition strips state.

The other strengthens the predicate.

They should not be treated as the same error.

A headline may compress a claim. It must not promote it.

Compression is unavoidable.

Headlines are short. Push notifications are shorter. Social cards have limited space.

The problem is not compression. The problem is changing epistemic meaning while compressing.

Aftenposten provided a useful positive example in September 2026. Its headline about a hotel employee accused after serving expired chicken to police retained the procedural state — *siktet*, charged — and described the concrete alleged act. The body separately reported the police theory, the woman's denial and that no illness was then known.

The headline did not need every detail from the body.

It did need to avoid silently upgrading the case.

That gives a useful rule:

A headline may compress a claim. It must not promote it.

In practical terms, editorial compression should not casually turn:

alleged -> established

possible -> confirmed

charged -> proved

correlation -> causation

The same principle matters for pushes, social cards and other surfaces that may be consumed without the article itself.

State changes over time

At 09:00, a newsroom may responsibly report:

Officials say P happened.

At 15:00, new evidence may contradict P.

The article body can be updated.

But the claim may already exist elsewhere: in a headline, a social card, a push notification, a screenshot or a cached result.

Not all of those surfaces remain under the publisher's control.

That limitation is itself important.

A publishing system should still remember at least:

- what was published;
- what is currently verified;
- where the older state was distributed, when that information is available.

That does not require every reader to see a dashboard.

It requires the publishing system not to forget.

Store more epistemic state than you show.

No universal truth badge

The obvious bad implementation is to attach giant labels to everything:

TRUE

FALSE

DISPUTED

That creates a new problem.

Who decides?

Under what standard?

Based on what evidence?

A court judgment, a regulatory finding, a scientific paper and an eyewitness account are not interchangeable forms of verification.

Their scope matters.

Their timing matters.

Their evidential basis matters.

A useful system should preserve those differences rather than flatten them.

The reader usually needs careful prose, not a badge.

The newsroom may need structured state underneath.

Four principles for claim state

A minimal standard could be:

1. **Keep the source attached.** Who asserts a claim remains part of its meaning.
2. **Keep verification separate.** What a source says and what has been independently established are different things.
3. **Carry state through time and surfaces.** Headlines, pushes, social cards and later versions must not silently strengthen or freeze an older state.
4. **Preserve history while updating meaning.** Keep what was originally published, but attach later verification, contradiction or resolution.

This is not a proposal to turn journalism into a database for readers.

It is a proposal to stop throwing away information the newsroom already understands.

What is still unproven

The reader interface is not solved.

Too much visible state could make articles unreadable.

Badges could imply more certainty than they deserve.

Conflicting expert communities may resist a single summary.

Legacy articles may need different update rules depending on age, prominence and harm.

Distributed surfaces may be impossible to update completely once they leave the publisher's control.

Those are implementation questions.

The core requirement is smaller.

A claim's journalistic meaning should not depend on the reader being lucky enough to encounter the one sentence where its attribution, verification state and date were explained correctly.

The claim can change.

The source can change position.

The verification record can change.

The headline can outlive the body.

The publication system should remember the difference.

Sources

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RELATION MEMORY

NEARBY [Questions Should Not Disappear](#) · Previous instalment in Journalism, Reassembled. Article 003 preserves material unanswered questions; Article 004 preserves the source position and verification state of a claim as it moves through time and surfaces.

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