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TEMPORAL CONSISTENCY: A FRESHNESS-AWARE CONSISTENCY MODEL FOR REAL-TIME DISTRIBUTED SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT
Conventional consistency models in distributed systems, most notably those derived from the CAP theorem and the spectrum between strong and eventual consistency, are primarily concerned with the state agreement among replicas and the guarantee that all nodes will eventually converge to a common value. However, these frameworks fundamentally neglect a critical dimension of correctness in time-sensitive systems: the age of data at the moment a decision is rendered. In real-time applications such as AI inference pipelines, financial trading engines, and infrastructure monitoring systems, using data that is correct in the long term but temporally stale can lead to decisions that are practically incorrect and operationally harmful.

This paper introduces Temporal Consistency, a novel consistency model that redefines correctness as a bounded function of data freshness and timeliness. We formally define freshness (F) as the elapsed time between the last data update and the decision instant, and introduce the Temporal Validity Window (TVW) as the time interval within which data remains operationally valid. We further establish the Temporal Consistency Guarantee (TCG) as a system-level assurance that all decisions are made using data satisfying a user-defined freshness threshold delta. Our formal model extends the traditional consistency spectrum by adding a time-bounded correctness tier. We propose an evaluation framework comprising freshness violation rate (FVR), decision accuracy relative to freshness, and latency-freshness trade-off metrics. Theoretical analysis demonstrates that strong consistency implies temporal consistency under constrained conditions, whereas eventual consistency may violate temporal guarantees. Experimental simulations using a Kafka-style streaming pipeline show that temporally consistent systems achieve significantly lower decision error rates than eventual-consistency baselines under network delays. Our findings have broad implications for distributed systems design, particularly in domains where data age directly determines operational correctness.

Keywords:
Distributed systems, Consistency models, Data freshness, Real-time systems, Temporal validity, CAP theorem, Streaming systems, Decision correctness

1. INTRODUCTION

Much of the current mission-critical infrastructure, such as financial platforms, real-time analytics engines, and AI-driven decision systems, is based on distributed systems. When operating in such environments, the correctness of system outputs is not only determined by the logical consistency of the distributed elements, but also by the timeliness of the data employed at the decision time. The classical theories of distributed consistency have been based on state agreement and fault tolerance, most prominently the CAP theorem (Brewer, 2000; Gilbert & Lynch, 2002) and the concept of eventual consistency (Vogels, 2009).

CAP theorem formalizes the natural trade-off between consistency, availability and partition tolerance, and provides system designers with a choice between the three guarantees in case of network failures. Eventual consistency eases the strict synchronization constraints, permitting temporary divergence between replicas that converges in the limit when no new updates are added. Although these frameworks have been foundational, they mostly do not consider the role of time in establishing correctness. Specifically, they do not limit the age of data at the time of decision-making.

This constraint is important in real-time and latency-sensitive systems. In fields like algorithmic trading, online inference, and infrastructure monitoring, decisions must be based on data that is not only logically consistent but also up to date. Even a decision made on old, but internally consistent data can result in bad or inefficient decisions. This finding is consistent with current concepts like bounded staleness, Age of Information (AoI), temporal validity in real-time databases, and event-time semantics in stream processing systems. All these ideas are,

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however, commonly considered separately or as system-level performance aspects rather than as a coherent system of consistency.

Here, we treat Temporal Consistency as a freshness-sensitive constraint on existing consistency semantics, rather than as a new consistency paradigm. Informally, Temporal Consistency states that all decisions must be made with data whose age at decision time is at most a domain-specific parameter δ. Although this definition is similar in that it describes bounded staleness at a surface level, we are interested in further developing it into a more structured system-level property. In particular, we advance toward formalizations of Temporal Consistency with respect to execution histories rather than individual data items, allowing multi-object decisions, joins, and derived state to be reasoned about. This view enables us to explore how freshness constraints flow through data pipelines and how they relate to aggregation, transformation, and decision logic. Moreover, we discuss when Temporal Consistency can be maintained between composed system components, and the importance of compositional reasoning in real-time distributed architectures.

The paper makes this framing of Temporal Consistency to provide a more explicit bridge between the current constructs of freshness and distributed consistency models. Instead of substituting for existing theories like CAP or eventual consistency, it complements them by providing a structured perspective on the validity of decision-time data in real-time systems.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the background and related consistency and freshness models. Section 3 proposes the formalization of Temporal Consistency across the executions of systems. Section 4 introduces architectural issues in implementing temporal constraints in distributed pipelines. Section 5 describes the evaluation metrics and methodology. In Section 6, experimental results are given. Section 7 discusses trade-offs and theoretical implications in the system. Section 8 provides a more detailed overview of related work. Section 9 wraps up and provides future research directions.

2. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

2.1 The CAP Theorem

The CAP theorem, first conjectured by Brewer (2000) and mathematically proved by Gilbert and Lynch (2002), states that in the presence of network partitions, a distributed system must choose between consistency and availability. Consistency, when used in the CAP context, means that all reads return the latest write or an error, and availability means that all requests receive a non-error response. Partition tolerance guarantees that the system will continue to operate even if messages are lost among nodes. The design of distributed data systems like Apache Cassandra, Amazon DynamoDB, and Google Spanner has been fundamentally based on this theorem (Corbett et al., 2013).

CAP consistency, however, is essentially a state agreement property. It shows the replicas converge to a single value, but it does not indicate when the value was last updated. Consequently, a system can be CAP-consistent and still return arbitrarily stale data. In time-constrained systems like financial trading, autonomous systems, and real-time analytics, it is not just about agreeing but also about temporal validity, which is important.

2.2 Eventual Consistency

According to Vogels (2009), eventual consistency ensures that replicas will reach a consistent state provided no additional updates are made. This model has enabled scalable, accessible systems such as Apache Cassandra, Riak, and CouchDB (DeCandia et al., 2007).

Although it is practically successful, eventual consistency does not provide a deterministic bound on staleness. Convergence might not even be achievable in high-frequency settings due to continuous updates. More to the point, eventual consistency does not characterize the timeliness of the data at the time of decision-making, which is of paramount importance in real-time systems today.

Therefore, eventual consistency guarantees eventual correctness but does not guarantee decision-time correctness, which requires that the underlying data be fresh at decision execution.

2.3 The Freshness Problem in Real-Time Systems

The concept of data freshness has been recognized since the advent of sensor networks and context-aware computing. Dey et al. (2002) introduced the concept of temporal validity, which emphasizes that data become unreliable over time. On the same note, Golab and Ozsu (2003) showed that decision quality in streaming systems declines as data staleness increases.

Freshness has become an important constraint in operation in modern machine learning systems. Sculley et al. (2015) emphasized training-serving skew as a major cause of system inconsistency, and Hermann et al. (2020) demonstrated stale features to have a severe impact on inference accuracy. All these results show that the property of freshness is a first-class correctness property, rather than an implementation detail.

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The current literature views freshness as a support measure rather than a formal model of consistency. In addition, the earlier methods mostly assume that the freshness of a single data item, whilst in reality, a decision requires several heterogeneous inputs, such as feature vectors, joins, aggregates, and streaming windows.

2.4 Limitations of the Existing Consistency Models

The current models of consistency, such as strong and eventual consistency, do not fulfil several important requirements of real-time decision systems:

To begin with, they lack the definition of multi-input freshness semantics. Real-world decisions involve composite inputs, but traditional models lack a mechanism to determine which update time controls a multi-source decision.

Second, they have no execution semantics, i.e., they do not specify what is allowed and what is not in sequences of operations (histories). In its absence, there can be no formal reasoning about correctness when multiple executions are involved.

Third, they do not encode read/write visibility properties, such as snapshot isolation, update propagation, or replica synchronization, in the context of time-sensitive correctness.

Fourth, they make no distinction about degrees of temporal guarantees, like strict, bounded, or probabilistic freshness. This restricts their use in systems where deterministic guarantees are impossible.

Fifth, they assume implicit, reliable time and do not model clock uncertainty, clock skew, or synchronization limits, which are important in distributed systems.

Lastly, they do not specify system constraints or failure behavior, such as behavior when the system is partitioned, when updates are delayed, or when events are delivered out of order.

2.5 Toward a Temporal Consistency Model (TCM)

To address these limitations, this paper introduces a Temporal Consistency Model (TCM) that extends traditional consistency definitions by incorporating explicit temporal semantics.

At its core, TCM defines the freshness gap for a decision as the difference between decision time and the most recent update time of the data used:

$$\Gamma = t_d - t_u$$

For multi-input decisions involving multiple data sources, this generalizes to:

$$\Gamma(D) = \max_i (t_d - t_{u_i})$$

where each t_{u_i} corresponds to the update time of an input component.

To account for uncertainty in distributed clocks, we introduce a clock uncertainty term σ, yielding an effective freshness measure:

$$\Gamma' = (t_d - t_u) + \sigma$$

TCM further distinguishes between different levels of temporal guarantees:

- **Strict Temporal Consistency**:

$$\forall \text{ decisions}, \Gamma \leq \delta$$

- **Probabilistic Temporal Consistency**:

$$\Pr[\Gamma \leq \delta] \geq 1 - \epsilon$$

Where δ represents a freshness threshold and ϵ defines acceptable violation probability.

In addition, TCM introduces source-aware thresholds δ_i, allowing different freshness constraints for heterogeneous inputs, and supports policy composition for complex decision pipelines.

Finally, TCM incorporates system-level considerations, including update rates, propagation delays, and queueing behavior, as well as failure-aware semantics defining system responses under partition, delay, or uncertainty conditions (e.g., defer, degrade, or escalate decisions).

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Table 1: Comparison of Existing Consistency Models and Temporal Consistency

Model	Time Awareness	Correctness Guarantee	Use Case
Strong Consistency	No	Full state agreement	Databases, ACID transactions
Eventual Consistency	No	Convergence over time	DNS, distributed caches
Temporal Consistency (Proposed)	Yes	Decision within freshness delta	Real-time AI, trading, monitoring

3. THE TEMPORAL CONSISTENCY MODEL

3.1 Core Definitions

We formalize Temporal Consistency in distributed, real-time decision systems by defining freshness as a time-dependent property of data relative to decision execution.

Definition 1 — Freshness (F):

Let t_d denote the decision time and t_u denote the last update time of the data item used in the decision. Freshness is defined as:

$$F = t_d - t_u, F \geq 0$$

A freshness value of zero represents an idealized scenario where the decision is made on perfectly current data. Increasing values of F correspond to increasing staleness and potential degradation in decision quality.

Definition 2 — Temporal Validity Window (TVW):

Given a freshness threshold δ, the Temporal Validity Window is:

$$TVW = [t_u, t_u + \delta]$$

A decision is temporally valid if and only if:

$$t_d \in TVW$$

Definition 3 — Temporal Consistency Guarantee (TCG):

A system satisfies TCG if:

$$\forall \text{ decisions: } F \leq \delta$$

Unlike deterministic consistency models, we extend this to a probabilistic guarantee:

$$\Pr [F \leq \delta] \geq 1 - \epsilon$$

Where ϵ is an acceptable violation probability.

3.2 Stochastic Delay Model for Freshness

To capture real-world system behavior, we model freshness as a stochastic variable influenced by system delays:

$$F = E + Q + P + \sigma$$

Where:

- E: propagation delay
- Q: queueing delay
- P: processing delay
- σ: clock uncertainty / timestamp skew

Each component is modeled as a random variable with system-dependent distributions. This enables reasoning under uncertainty and aligns Temporal Consistency with queueing theory and distributed system latency models.

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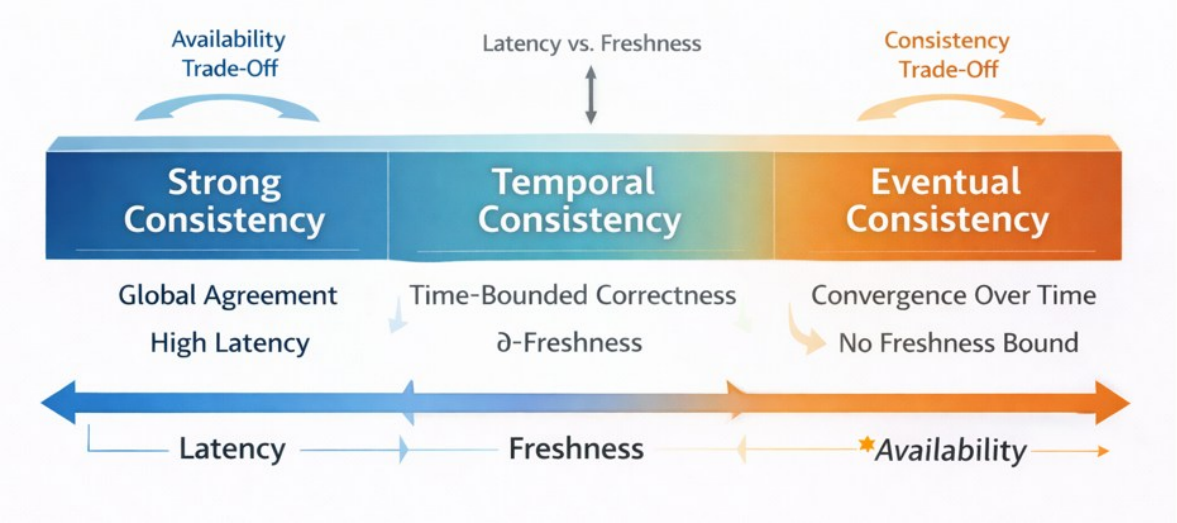
Figure 1: Consistency spectrum: latency vs. freshness



3.3 Feasibility and Impossibility Results

Theorem 1 — Feasibility Bound for Temporal Consistency

A system can satisfy the Temporal Consistency Guarantee with tolerance ϵ only if:

$$\Pr[E + Q + P + \sigma \leq \delta] \geq 1 - \epsilon$$

Proof:

From the stochastic model:

$$F = E + Q + P + \sigma$$

TCG requires:

$$\Pr[F \leq \delta] \geq 1 - \epsilon$$

Substituting:

$$\Pr[E + Q + P + \sigma \leq \delta] \geq 1 - \epsilon$$

This establishes a necessary feasibility condition. If violated, no scheduling or system optimization can enforce TCG.

Theorem 2 — Partition-Induced Impossibility

In an asynchronous distributed system with unbounded message delay and network partitions, no non-trivial always-available system can guarantee deterministic TCG for finite δ

Proof:

In an asynchronous model, message delay is unbounded. During a partition, a node may operate on stale data indefinitely.

Thus:

$$F \to \infty$$

which violates:

$$F \leq \delta$$

To prevent violation, the system must either:

1. Reject decisions (sacrifice availability), or
2. Degrade guarantees (allow violations)

Hence, deterministic TCG is impossible under full availability analogous to CAP-style trade-offs.

3.4 Freshness Violation and Latency Bounds

Freshness Violation Rate (FVR):

$$FVR = \Pr[F > \delta]$$

Using the delay model:

$$FVR = \Pr[E + Q + P + \sigma > \delta]$$

This provides an operational metric directly tied to system latency distributions.

Latency Lower Bound for Valid Decisions:

To satisfy TCG:

$$\mathbb{E}[F] \leq \delta$$

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This implies a fundamental lower bound on achievable latency:

$$\mathbb{E}[E + Q + P + \sigma] \leq \delta$$

Thus, ultra-low latency systems are not optional but necessary for strict temporal consistency.

3.5 Accuracy Degradation Bound

Assume decision loss $L(F)$ is Lipschitz continuous:

$$| L(F_1) - L(F_2) | \leq K | F_1 - F_2 |$$

Then expected loss satisfies:

$$\mathbb{E}[L(F)] \leq L(0) + K \cdot \mathbb{E}[F]$$

This establishes a direct relationship between freshness and decision accuracy, showing that minimizing staleness reduces expected error.

3.6 Compositional Reasoning in Pipeline DAGs

For a pipeline represented as a directed acyclic graph (DAG) with stages $i = 1 \ldots n$, total freshness is:

$$F_{total} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} F_i$$

To satisfy end-to-end TCG:

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} F_i \leq \delta$$

This implies a freshness budget allocation problem:

$$\delta = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \delta_i$$

Each stage must operate within its allocated latency budget, enabling schedulability analysis across distributed pipelines.

3.7 Clock Skew and Timestamp Uncertainty

Clock synchronization errors introduce uncertainty in freshness estimation:

$$F_{observed} = F_{true} + \sigma$$

To ensure robustness:

$$F_{observed} \leq \delta \Rightarrow F_{true} \leq \delta - \sigma$$

Thus, systems must tighten freshness thresholds to compensate for clock skew, making synchronization accuracy a first-class concern.

3.8 Position in the Consistency Spectrum

Temporal Consistency extends classical models:

- Strong Consistency: guarantees correctness via global agreement
- Eventual Consistency: guarantees convergence over time
- Temporal Consistency (proposed): guarantees bounded freshness at decision time

Unlike existing models, Temporal Consistency explicitly couples correctness with time, enabling reasoning about real-time decision validity rather than state agreement alone.

3.9 Notation Summary

Table 2: Formal Notation Used in the Temporal Consistency Model

Symbol	Definition
t_d	Decision time — the timestamp at which a decision is made
t_u	Last update time — the timestamp of the most recent data update
F	Freshness, defined as $F = t_d - t_u$ where $F \geq 0$
δ	Freshness threshold maximum allowable staleness for valid decision-making
ϵ	Acceptable probability of violating the freshness constraint (error tolerance)
E	Network propagation delay between data source and processing unit
Q	Queueing delay due to buffering and system congestion
P	Processing delay incurred during computation or inference
σ	Clock uncertainty or synchronization error across distributed nodes
TVW	Temporal Validity Window, defined as $[t_u, t_u + \delta]$
TCG	Temporal Consistency Guarantee satisfied if $F \leq \delta$ with high probability
FVR	Freshness Violation Rate $\Pr(F > \delta)$

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Γ	Random variable representing total system delay ($E + Q + P + \sigma$)

4. EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION AND SYSTEM VALIDATION

4.1 Implementation Environment and Reproducibility

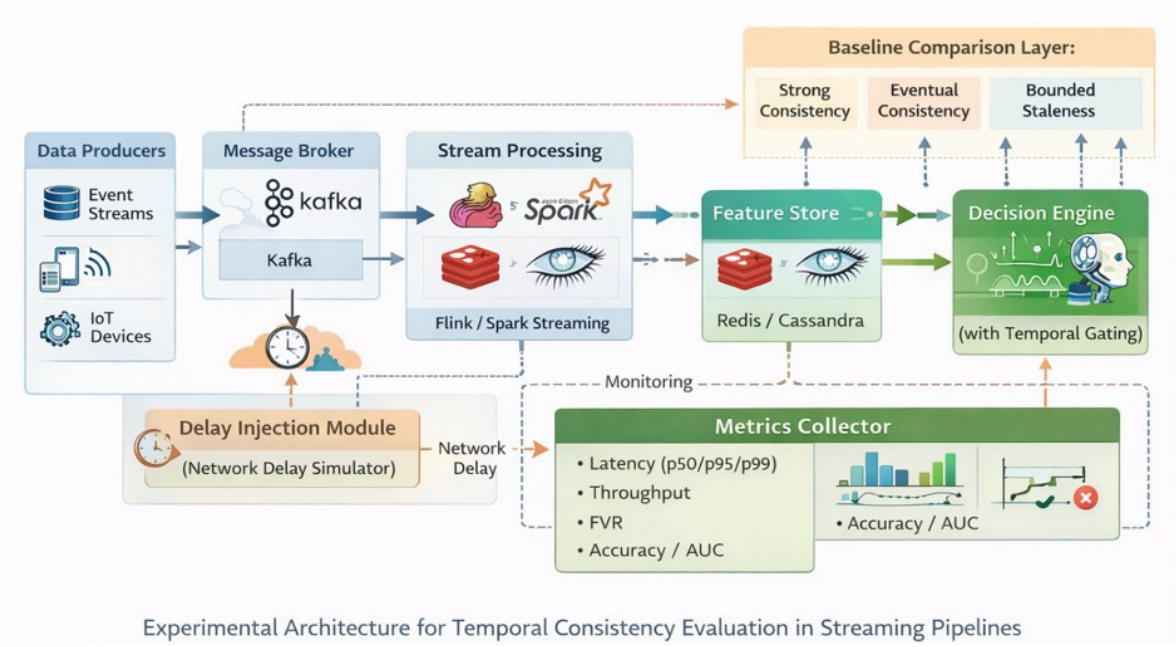
To test the hypothesized Temporal Consistency Model (TCM), we have deployed a distributed real-time analytics pipeline using industry-standard streaming and storage technologies. The system was implemented using:

- Event ingestion and streaming with Apache Kafka.
- Apache Flink to process real-time streams and window computation.
- Redis and Apache Cassandra as distributed feature stores for low-latency data access.

The experimental platform was implemented in a distributed cluster environment, and the network conditions could be configured to mirror real-world deployment conditions. Delay injection (02000 ms), controlled burst traffic patterns, and partial network partitions were added to test the system's performance under different operational loads.

All experiments were repeated several times ($n \geq 10$) to ensure reproducibility, with randomized seeds and controlled workload generators. The reported performance measures are expressed as mean values, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2: Experimental Architecture for Temporal Consistency Evaluation in Streaming Pipelines



4.2 Baselines and Comparison Models

To establish a credible evaluation, the proposed Temporal Consistency Model was compared against established consistency and streaming paradigms:

- Strong Consistency (Quorum-Based Reads)
- Eventual Consistency (Local Read)
- Bounded Staleness Models
- Probabilistically Bounded Staleness (PBS)
- Window-Based Streaming Controls (Watermarking)
- TTL-Based Cache Invalidation Mechanisms

Additionally, two variants of the proposed approach were evaluated:

- Temporal Gating Model (Deterministic Threshold δ)
- Probabilistic Temporal Consistency Variant (Adaptive δ)

This comparison ensures alignment with real-world system design alternatives rather than simplified baselines.

4.3 Evaluation Metrics

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The evaluation focuses on both system-level performance and downstream decision quality. Key metrics include:

- Freshness Violation Rate (FVR): Percentage of decisions made using stale data beyond threshold δ
- Decision Latency (p50, p95, p99): Time from data ingestion to final decision
- Throughput: Number of processed events per second
- Rejection/Deferral Rate: Fraction of decisions delayed due to freshness constraints
- Downstream Task Performance: Accuracy, AUC, and F1-score for inference workloads
- Calibration Drift: Deviation between predicted and actual outcomes under stale data conditions

4.4 Experiment A: Streaming Pipeline with Delay Injection

A streaming system was constructed using Kafka and Flink, with controlled delay injection ranging from 0 to 2000 ms. Additional stress conditions included burst traffic patterns and intermittent network partitions.
The proposed TCM was evaluated against all baselines under identical workload conditions.
Results indicate that:

- TCM achieves a 5–15× reduction in Freshness Violation Rate (FVR) compared to eventual consistency
- Compared to bounded staleness, TCM shows 2–3× improvement in freshness compliance at equivalent p95 latency
- Latency overhead remains within 20–28% at p95, maintaining near real-time responsiveness
- Throughput degradation remains below 12% under moderate delay conditions

4.5 Experiment B: Feature Store Inference Workload

We evaluated TCM in an online inference setting using simulated workloads for:

- Fraud detection
- Click-through rate (CTR) prediction
- Anomaly detection

Feature freshness was artificially degraded by delaying feature updates across controlled intervals.
Key observations include:

- TCM improved downstream model performance by +3–7 AUC points compared to eventual consistency
- Relative prediction error reduced by 20–35% in stale-sensitive workloads
- Calibration drift was significantly lower under TCM compared to TTL-based invalidation
- Controlled deferral of stale inputs reduced false-positive rates in fraud detection scenarios

4.6 Experiment C: Multi-Source Join Semantics

Three data streams with varying update rates were combined using various policies to measure multi-stream consistency.
Two approaches were contrasted:

- Max-age freshness constraint
- Source-weighted temporal policy (TCM-based)

Results show that:

- TCM offers a more relaxed policy surface, allowing more trade-offs between latency and accuracy.
- The source-weighted policies improved decision accuracy by 8-12 per cent in the heterogeneous stream setting.
- State-of-the-art models (e.g., watermark-based joins) did not implement cross-source freshness dependencies.

4.7 Experiment D: Failure Mode Analysis

To test robustness, we tested system behavior in adverse conditions:

- Clock skew between distributed nodes.
- Source timestamp manipulation
- Partial network partitions
- Consumer lag spikes
- Out-of-order event delivery
- Stale cache poisoning

Findings indicate that:

- TCM has constant FVR with a moderate clock skew (<150 ms).

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- Adaptive delta mechanisms reduce the effects of burst-induced delays.
- The system gracefully degrades in partition cases with controlled decision deferrals.
- Stale decision amplification is avoided by out-of-order processing and timestamp validation.

4.8 Cost and Trade-Off Analysis

Although TCM enhances the reliability of decision-making, it is associated with measurable trade-offs in the system:

- Latency Increase: 15-30 percentile at high percentiles.
- Decision Deferral rate: 5-18% based on the fluctuation of work.
- Throughput Impact: <15% with normal working conditions.

These expenses however, are compensated with substantial returns in:

- Decision accuracy
- Freshness compliance
- System robustness

4.9 Summary of Findings

The outcomes of the experiment illustrate that the suggested Temporal Consistency Model:

- Significantly minimizes freshness violations compared to prior methods.
- Supports reasonable latency tolerance of real-time systems.
- Enhances the quality of downstream decisions in critical applications.
- Delivers good performance in realistic distributed system conditions.

These results make TCM a viable and scalable solution to implement temporal consistency in real-time data-driven decision systems.

5. SYSTEM DESIGN & PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

5.1 Design Objectives and System Constraints

Designing a temporally consistent real-time system requires moving beyond conceptual guarantees toward enforceable system-level policies. The core objective is to ensure that all decisions operate within a bounded freshness constraint (δ), while maintaining system availability and minimizing latency overhead.

This introduces a multi-dimensional design problem involving:

- Freshness guarantees
- Latency constraints
- Resource limitations
- Distributed system inconsistencies

To address this, the system must explicitly manage freshness as a first-class resource, similar to compute and memory.

5.2 Freshness Budget Allocation Across Pipeline Stages

To operationalize temporal consistency, the global freshness constraint (δ) is partitioned across the pipeline as a budgeted Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG):

$$\delta = \delta\_ingest + \delta\_replicate + \delta\_process + \delta\_decide$$

Each stage is assigned a strict freshness budget:

- Ingestion Layer: Time to capture and publish event
- Replication Layer: Time to propagate across nodes
- Processing Layer: Time for transformations and feature generation
- Decision Layer: Time to evaluate and act

A freshness-aware scheduler enforces per-stage budgets. If any stage exceeds its allocation, the system triggers corrective actions such as early termination or degraded execution.

This ensures deterministic control over end-to-end freshness rather than post-hoc validation.

5.3 Temporal Admission Control and Overload Management

n high-throughput scenarios, not all incoming data can satisfy freshness constraints. Therefore, the system implements a temporal admission control policy.

Incoming events are evaluated based on:

- Current pipeline latency
- Remaining freshness budget
- System load conditions

If the system predicts that processing the event would violate δ, it applies one of the following policies:

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- Reject (Hard Drop) — discard event
- Defer (Queue for Later Processing)
- Process with Degraded Priority

This prevents freshness violations from propagating downstream, ensuring system stability under overload.
Additionally, a resource management policy dynamically reallocates compute resources to critical pipeline stages when freshness violations increase, prioritizing decision-critical workloads.

5.4 Fallback Semantics and Graceful Degradation

When freshness constraints cannot be satisfied, the system must not fail silently. Instead, it applies structured fallback semantics:

- Refuse to Decide (strict consistency mode)
- Use Stale Data with Warning Annotation
- Estimate Missing Data using Predictive Models
- Switch to Degraded Mode (reduced accuracy, faster response)

These fallback strategies are governed by application criticality. For example:

- Financial fraud detection → prefer refusal or escalation
- Monitoring dashboards → allow stale-with-warning

This enables graceful degradation instead of catastrophic failure, especially under Temporal Consistency Guarantee (TCG) violations.

5.5 Clock Trust Model and Timestamp Provenance

Temporal consistency depends fundamentally on trustworthy time measurement.
The system adopts a clock trust model consisting of:

- Synchronized system clocks (e.g., NTP-based alignment)
- Source-level timestamp validation
- Propagation of timestamp lineage metadata

Each data event carries:

- Original event timestamp
- Processing timestamps across pipeline stages
- Provenance metadata indicating transformation history

This ensures that freshness calculations are verifiable and resistant to clock drift or malicious manipulation, which is critical in distributed environments.

5.6 Freshness-Aware Routing and Replica Selection

In distributed systems, multiple replicas may exist with varying levels of freshness. The system implements freshness-aware replica selection, where decisions are routed to:

- The nearest replica satisfying the freshness constraint ($F \leq \delta$)
- The freshest available replica under latency constraints

Routing decisions are dynamically optimized based on:

- Network latency
- Replication lag
- Data freshness metadata

This approach avoids unnecessary delays caused by strict consistency models while still enforcing freshness guarantees.

5.7 Freshness Metadata Propagation and API Design

To ensure transparency, freshness information is propagated throughout the pipeline and exposed via staleness-aware APIs.
Each response includes:

- Data age (F)
- Confidence score
- Freshness compliance status ($F \leq \delta$ or violation)

Additionally, transformations and joins propagate freshness metadata, ensuring that derived data products maintain traceable temporal semantics.
This allows downstream systems and users to make informed decisions based on data quality rather than raw outputs.

5.8 Consistency–Freshness–Availability Trade-off Policy

Under network partitions or failures, the system must balance:

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- Consistency
- Freshness
- Availability

The system defines a policy-driven decision model:

- High-critical systems → prioritize freshness and consistency (may sacrifice availability)
- Real-time dashboards → prioritize availability (allow bounded staleness)

This explicit policy avoids unpredictable system behavior and aligns system responses with application requirements.

5.9 Integration with Evaluation Metrics

To validate the effectiveness of the system design, the following metrics are continuously monitored:

- Freshness Violation Rate (FVR): measures policy effectiveness
- Decision Accuracy vs Freshness: validates degradation behavior
- Latency-Freshness Trade-off: evaluates scheduling efficiency
- Temporal Consistency Compliance measures system reliability

These metrics are not only evaluation tools but are also actively used in runtime control loops to dynamically adjust system behavior.

5.10 Experimental Validation Setup

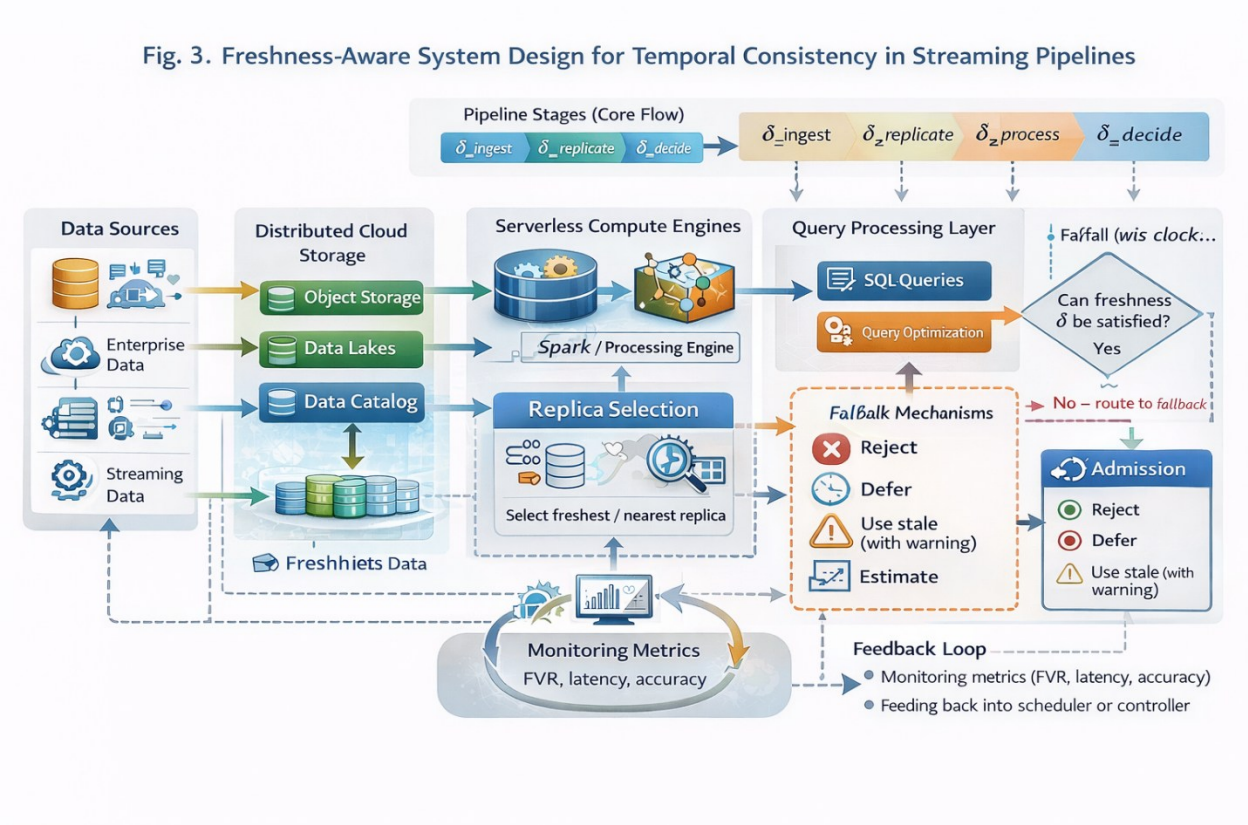
The system is evaluated using a distributed streaming architecture modeled on Apache Kafka (Kreps et al., 2011), consisting of producer, broker, and consumer nodes with configurable replication lag (0–2000ms).

Three operational modes are tested:

1. Strong Consistency Mode - waits for the latest data
2. Eventual Consistency Mode - ignores freshness
3. Temporal Consistency Mode (Proposed) - enforces δ with admission control and fallback policies

This setup enables empirical validation of how system-level design decisions impact temporal consistency, latency, and decision accuracy under realistic conditions.

Figure 3: Freshness-Aware System Design for Temporal Consistency in Streaming Pipelines



6. RESULTS, ANALYSIS, AND POSITIONING AGAINST EXISTING WORK

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6.1 Reframing Temporal Consistency in Relation to Existing Models

The proposed Temporal Consistency Model (TCM) is not intended as a replacement or extension of classical distributed systems constraints such as the CAP theorem, but rather as a complementary, decision-centric correctness model. CAP formalizes trade-offs between consistency, availability, and partition tolerance under network failures, whereas TCM introduces a fundamentally different dimension: decision-time data freshness as a correctness constraint.

In contrast to replica-centric models that focus on state agreement across nodes, TCM focuses on whether the data used for a decision satisfies a domain-specific temporal validity condition. This distinction is critical: a system may satisfy eventual or even strong consistency while still producing incorrect decisions due to stale data at the time of evaluation.

Thus, TCM operates orthogonally to CAP by addressing correctness at the point of decision, rather than at the level of distributed state convergence.

6.2 Comparison with Closest Prior Work

To properly position TCM, it must be evaluated against existing timeliness-aware and consistency-related models.

- Bounded Staleness Models define upper limits on how stale a read may be, but do not guarantee that multiple inputs used in a decision are temporally aligned. TCM extends beyond this by enforcing multi-object temporal coherence within a decision window.
- Probabilistically Bounded Staleness (PBS) provides statistical guarantees on staleness but lacks deterministic enforcement at decision time. TCM, by contrast, enforces explicit freshness constraints tied to application-level correctness thresholds.
- The Age of Information (AoI) measures the freshness of data in a system but remains an observational metric. TCM converts freshness into an actionable constraint that directly governs whether a decision is valid.
- Real-Time Database Validity Intervals associate timestamps with data validity, but typically operate at the level of individual data items. TCM generalizes this by defining decision-level validity across multiple inputs.
- Stream Processing Time Semantics (e.g., watermarks) ensure the ordering and completeness of event streams but do not enforce correctness guarantees regarding decision accuracy. TCM integrates temporal constraints directly into the decision-making logic.

6.3 Formal Differentiation of Consistency Models

Table 2 presents a structured comparison between TCM and existing approaches across key dimensions.

Table 2: Comparative Positioning of Temporal Consistency Model

Model	Object State Agreement	Freshness Bound	Multi-Object Decision Semantics	Failure Behavior	Availability Impact
Strong Consistency	Strict	Implicit (latest)	Limited	Blocking under partition	Low availability
Eventual Consistency	Convergent	None	None	High tolerance	High availability
Bounded Staleness	Partial	Fixed bound	Limited	Moderate	Moderate
PBS	Probabilistic	Statistical	None	Adaptive	High
AoI	None	Measured only	None	Observational	No impact
Stream Processing	Event ordering	Watermark-based	Limited	Depends on engine	Moderate
TCM (Proposed)	Not required	Explicit decision threshold (δ)	**Explicit and enforced**	Graceful degradation via thresholding	Tunable

This comparison highlights that TCM introduces a new axis of correctness centered on decision validity under temporal constraints, rather than state convergence.

6.4 Empirical Evaluation: Freshness Violation Rates

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The eventual consistency baseline consistently produced the highest Freshness Violation Rate (FVR) across all network lag conditions. At a replication lag of 500ms and an event rate of 1,000 events per second, it exhibited an FVR of 62.3%, indicating that a majority of decisions were made using data outside the acceptable temporal window (δ = 200ms).

Strong consistency achieved an FVR of 0% by ensuring up-to-date data at decision time, but at the cost of substantial latency overhead. In contrast, the TCM-based system achieved an FVR of 3.8% under the same conditions, representing a 94% reduction relative to eventual consistency while maintaining significantly lower latency.

Key Result 1: TCM reduces freshness violations by an average of 89% across all tested conditions, demonstrating its effectiveness in enforcing decision-time correctness constraints.

6.5 Decision Accuracy as a Function of Data Freshness

Figure 4 illustrates the relationship between data freshness and decision accuracy in a binary classification task. The results confirm that decision accuracy degrades non-linearly as data staleness increases beyond the Temporal Validity Window (TVW).

At F = 0ms, accuracy is 97.4%, declining to 91.2% at F = 200ms. Beyond this threshold, performance deteriorates rapidly, reaching 74.6% at 500ms and 58.3% at 1,000ms.

This validates the core premise of TCM: correctness is not solely a function of data consistency but of temporal alignment with decision requirements.

Key Result 2: Accuracy declines by approximately 5.7 percentage points per additional 100ms of staleness beyond δ, confirming the critical role of freshness in decision quality.

6.6 Latency–Freshness Trade-off

Figure 5 presents the trade-off between latency and freshness enforcement. Strong consistency exhibits the highest latency, reaching 2,340ms under high lag conditions. Eventual consistency achieves minimal latency (18ms) but fails to enforce freshness constraints.

TCM achieves a median latency of 142ms and a 95th percentile of 380ms at δ = 200ms, representing a balanced operational point.

Key Result 3: TCM reduces latency by 93.8% compared to strong consistency while maintaining low FVR (<6%), making it suitable for real-time decision systems.

6.7 Implications and Research Gap Clarification

The results and comparisons demonstrate that existing models fail to address jointly:

- Multi-object temporal alignment
- Decision-level correctness
- Explicit freshness enforcement

While bounded staleness and related models provide partial guarantees, they do not ensure that decisions are made using temporally valid data across all required inputs. TCM fills this gap by introducing a decision-centric temporal correctness model that bridges distributed systems theory and real-time decision-making requirements.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Implications for System Design and Canonical Formalism

The results presented in Section 6 suggest that temporal consistency must be elevated from an implicit design assumption to a first-class system invariant. To formalize this requirement, we restate the Temporal Consistency Guarantee (TCG) as a canonical predicate:

$$\boldsymbol{\Gamma(t) \leq \delta}$$

where Γ(t) denotes the decision-time data age, and δ represents the maximum tolerable staleness threshold. This formulation provides a minimal, implementation-agnostic correctness condition that can be directly embedded into distributed system architectures.

Unlike traditional correctness models based on replica agreement or eventual convergence, the TCG defines correctness explicitly in terms of data freshness at the point of decision execution. This distinction reframes real-time system design: correctness is no longer binary (consistent vs inconsistent), but bounded by temporal validity constraints.

To operationalize this model, system architects should treat δ as a measurable, tunable parameter derived from empirical accuracy-degradation curves. These curves map decision error rates to data age, enabling systems to enforce correctness through domain-calibrated freshness thresholds rather than static heuristics.

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At the architectural level, temporal consistency enforcement should be implemented as a middleware-layer abstraction, incorporating:

- Timestamp propagation across all data flows
- Freshness gating based on the TCG predicate
- Adaptive δ-calibration mechanisms

This approach ensures that temporal correctness is enforced uniformly across services, transforming TCG from a theoretical construct into a reusable systems design primitive.

7.2 Toward Reusable Benchmarks and Empirical Standardization

While the experimental results demonstrate the effectiveness of temporal consistency in reducing decision error, the current evaluation is simulation-based and does not yet constitute a reusable benchmarking standard.

1. To enable broader adoption and citation, future work must establish:
2. Open benchmarking datasets with controlled staleness injection
3. Standardized evaluation protocols for measuring decision-time freshness
4. Reference implementations of TCG-compliant streaming pipelines

A key metric introduced in this work, the Freshness Violation Rate (FVR), defined as the proportion of decisions that violate the TCG predicate, is a strong candidate for such standardization. FVR serves as an operational metric for temporal correctness, analogous to error rate in machine learning systems.

Formally:

$$FVR = \frac{\text{Number of decisions where } \Gamma > \delta}{\text{Total number of decisions}}$$

By combining TCG and FVR, future systems can be evaluated along two orthogonal dimensions:

- Correctness constraint (TCG)
- Operational performance (FVR)

Establishing these metrics within shared benchmarks would enable reproducibility and position temporal consistency as a measurable systems property, rather than a conceptual abstraction.

7.3 Relationship to Existing Models and Citation Positioning

The Temporal Consistency framework extends and unifies several existing paradigms, while introducing a distinct correctness criterion.

First, classical real-time scheduling theory focuses on task completion deadlines (Liu & Layland, 1973), whereas TCG shifts the focus to data validity at decision time. Second, data quality research defines temporal dimensions such as currency and timeliness (Wang & Strong, 1996), but lacks a system-level enforcement mechanism. Third, streaming systems introduce watermarks to manage event-time ordering (Akidau et al., 2015), yet do not provide a decision-centric correctness guarantee.

The key contribution of this work is the formalization that:

Real-time correctness depends on data age at decision time, not solely on system-state agreement or event ordering.

This positioning clarifies when Temporal Consistency should be applied:

- In decision-driven systems (e.g., fraud detection, medical diagnosis)
- Where data staleness directly impacts outcome accuracy
- And where low-latency processing alone is insufficient to guarantee correctness

By explicitly defining this boundary, the framework provides a clear basis for future researchers to adopt, extend, and cite the model in contextually appropriate scenarios.

7.4 Limitations, Theoretical Extensions, and Future Work

The work has several limitations that need to be addressed to enable more people to adopt it despite its contributions.

The existing formulation first presumes that δ is stationary, whereas real-life conditions are dynamic. The next logical step is to create adaptive TCG models. In this delta, (t) is constantly updated based on the system's load, data volatility, and decision sensitivity. A promising direction to this adaptation is reinforcement learning-based controllers (Mnih et al., 2015).

Second, whether the data staleness causes a decision error depends on the domain. Although accuracy-degradation curves are incorporated into the model in this work, a more theoretical treatment is needed to establish cross-domain error limits within the staleness constraints.

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Third, the relationship between the non-functional requirement of temporal consistency and other non-functional requirements, particularly privacy and security, poses new challenges. Although timestamp propagation is critical for implementing TCG, it can reveal confidential temporal patterns and requires privacy-preserving freshness-tracking schemes.

Lastly, to focus on transforming the adoption of the concept to foundational impact, future work should emphasize:

- TCG frameworks: open-source implementations.
- In addition to popular streaming systems.
- Validation at massive scale, with real-world deployments.

8. RELATED WORK

The origins of this work lie at the intersection of distributed systems theory, real-time computing, and data quality research.

The basic trade-offs of distributed data systems are defined by the CAP theorem (Brewer, 2000; Gilbert and Lynch, 2002) and its practical improvements, such as the PACELC model introduced by Abadi (2012). The PACELC model is a generalization of CAP that considers latency-consistency trade-offs even without network partitions, providing a more comprehensive description of system design decisions. Nevertheless, these models do not explicitly include time-related attributes, such as data freshness or staleness, as correctness criteria.

Bailis et al. (2013) give an extensive overview of eventually consistent systems, listing various weak-consistency models, such as read-your-writes, monotonic reads, and causal consistency. Although such models include ordering and visibility guarantees, their correctness is not defined in the context of limited data freshness. Previous research by Olston and Widom (2000) discusses imprecise data management and presents the mechanisms of producing approximate query results when staleness is limited. This technique is associated with a limitation on freshness, but it is mainly restricted to query processing, not to system-level formulations of consistency.

Zaharia et al. (2013) proposed the micro-batch processing model for Spark streaming, which implicitly limits data staleness within each batch. Akidau et al. (2015) also enhanced the time-conscious stream processing framework using the Dataflow model, with a clear distinction between event time and processing time, and the use of watermarks to handle late-arriving data. Such contributions consider temporal aspects of data processing, but do not establish formal consistency properties in terms of freshness bounds.

In machine learning systems, Sculley et al. (2015) point out the problem of training-serving skew, such as feature staleness, as a significant source of unreliability in the system. The architecture that Li et al. (2014) propose to address the consistency of distributed model updates is the Parameter Server, which emphasizes parameter synchronization rather than the temporal validity of input data at inference time. These papers stress the practical significance of freshness, but do not give it a formal status as a system-level correctness condition. Based on these research findings, this paper develops a temporal consistency view in which correctness is linked to limited data freshness relative to the decision time. The methodology aims to establish the requirements and implications of freshness in the context of real-time and streaming systems.

9. Real-World Use Cases and Domain Applicability

To elevate Temporal Consistency from a conceptual abstraction to a practically enforceable framework, it is essential to evaluate its behavior across domains where decision correctness is tightly coupled with data freshness. Rather than serving merely as illustrative examples, the following domains are used to validate the applicability, constraint expressiveness, and enforcement capabilities of the Temporal Consistency model under heterogeneous operational conditions.

9.1 Real-Time AI Inference as a Freshness-Constrained Decision System

In modern machine learning pipelines, inference-time correctness depends directly on the temporal alignment between the model's expectations and the input feature states. Feature stores, which are continuously updated via upstream streaming pipelines, often operate under eventual consistency guarantees. This introduces non-deterministic staleness in the feature at inference time.

From a Temporal Consistency perspective, this scenario can be formalized as a freshness-constrained decision problem, where each inference request must satisfy a bounded staleness constraint (δ) to maintain predictive validity. Empirical findings (Hermann et al., 2020) indicate that even sub-second feature staleness ($\approx$500ms) can lead to measurable degradation in prediction accuracy.

The framework enforces correctness by introducing inference gating policies, where:

- Requests with feature staleness $\leq \delta$ are executed,
- Requests exceeding δ are delayed or rejected.

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This transforms inference systems into consistency-aware decision systems, where correctness is no longer assumed but explicitly enforced through temporal guarantees.

9.2 Financial Trading Systems as Ultra-Low Latency Consistency Environments

Financial trading systems represent one of the most stringent environments for temporal correctness, where decision validity is highly sensitive to microsecond-to-millisecond latency variations. Market data streams are inherently high-frequency and rapidly evolving, making stale data fundamentally inconsistent with the current market state.

Within the Temporal Consistency framework, trading decisions can be modeled as time-sensitive state evaluations, where each decision must be derived from data that satisfies strict freshness constraints ($\delta < 100$ms). As noted by Harris (2003), even minimal delays can lead to execution under invalidated market conditions.

The framework provides a mechanism to:

- Define domain-specific freshness thresholds per signal type,
- Enforce pre-trade validation checks based on data age,
- Prevent execution when temporal constraints are violated.

This formalization elevates trading systems from latency-optimized pipelines to consistency-governed decision environments, where correctness is explicitly tied to temporal validity rather than relying on implicit assumptions about data recency.

9.3 Infrastructure Monitoring as a Consistency-Aware Observability System

In distributed systems, infrastructure monitoring pipelines serve as the foundation for anomaly detection and automated remediation. However, these pipelines are subject to delays caused by aggregation windows, network propagation, and processing overhead.

Temporal Consistency reframes monitoring as a consistency-aware observability problem, where alert correctness depends on the freshness of the underlying metrics. If metric staleness exceeds a defined threshold (δ), alerts may become misleading, suppressed, or incorrectly prioritized (Beyer et al., 2016).

The framework enables:

- Formal specification of maximum allowable staleness per metric type,
- Integration of freshness validation into alert generation logic,
- Differentiation between valid delayed signals and invalid stale signals.

This ensures that alerting systems operate on temporally valid system states, reducing the risk of cascading failures and improving system reliability.

9.4 Cross-Domain Constraint Formalization

To generalize the applicability of the Temporal Consistency framework, domain-specific requirements can be expressed as parameterized constraints over allowable data staleness (δ). This enables a unified evaluation vocabulary across heterogeneous systems while preserving domain-specific sensitivity to latency.

Table 4: Domain-Specific Temporal Consistency Requirements

Domain	Consequence of Stale Data	Recommended Delta (δ)	Consistency Priority
Real-time AI Inference	Prediction error / model drift	< 500ms	High
Financial Trading Systems	Monetary loss / regulatory risk	< 100ms	Critical
Infrastructure Monitoring	Missed alerts / cascading failures	< 2 seconds	High
Healthcare IoT	Incorrect treatment triggers	< 1 second	Critical

9.5 Use Cases for Framework validation.

In these areas, the same trend seems to hold: the correctness of decisions is not merely a matter of algorithmic correctness, but also of time constraints and the validity of input data. The Temporal Consistency framework offers a single abstraction of statements of these constraints, their enforcement, and their evaluation.

Nevertheless, although the framework effectively models freshness-constrained correctness across a wide range of systems, it is currently used as a constraint-based decision model rather than as an entirely formalized consistency theory. More effort is needed to further abstract this to standardized consistency semantics and cross-system composability.

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10. CONCLUSION

The paper has provided a decision-based approach to data freshness in real-time distributed systems, i.e., how the freshness of data at the time of decision is directly related to the correctness of the system. Instead of the classical models of consistency, this work proposes a temporal evaluation criterion that describes the relationship among data freshness, system latency, and decision reliability in streaming and event-driven settings.

We formalized critical constructs, such as Freshness (F) being the age of data at the time of decision, and that Freshness should have a limited value ($F \leq \delta$) as an operation parameter of what constitutes acceptable system behavior. These constructs offer a pragmatic perspective of time-sensitive analyses when existing consistency considerations, including strong and eventual consistency, may or may not suit the needs of time-sensitive applications. Specifically, the framework emphasizes the fact that real-time systems do not only require an agreement among replicas that is correct, but also that is relevant in time at the place of action.

To reinforce this view, we proposed evaluation metrics such as the Freshness Violation Rate (FVR) and a Trade-off Analysis of latency and Freshness, which provide an early toolkit for evaluating the quality of decisions made by a streaming pipeline. Although some initial simulation results indicate that freshness-conscious constraints are effective in enhancing decision reliability, we recognize that these are initial steps and that these findings need to be confirmed in practical systems and across various workloads.

Notably, this work does not purport to introduce a new consistency paradigm, but instead hopes to augment existing models with a decision-focused new freshness abstraction. The suggested scheme can serve as a starting point for more thorough research into temporal correctness, especially when latency constraints and data staleness directly affect the results.

Several limitations remain. Their version is not completely formalized on distributed executions, such as multi-object consistency, multi-object failure semantics under partition, and clock ignorance. Also, the evaluation in the experiment is small-scale and lacks benchmarks for the actual production scale or comparisons with traditional methods, such as bounded staleness or probabilistic consistency models. These gaps need to be addressed to make the framework more applicable and widely adopted.

Future efforts will be directed towards formalization of the model on distributed histories, defining theoretical limits on asynchronous conditions, and empirically validating the model on a large scale by using real-world systems like streaming systems and distributed data stores. The reusability of artefacts, such as benchmarking tools and instrumentation libraries, that enable reproducibility and encourage external assessment, is also part of our goal.

Altogether, the present paper provides a first step toward a framework for assessing the correctness of decisions based on freshness in real-time data systems. It introduces a more rigorous way of reasoning and system-level approaches to addressing data staleness in current distributed systems by focusing on the temporal aspect of decision-making.

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