Attention Legitimacy Index (ALI v0) Primer

The Problem

Modern information systems allocate attention faster than they can verify completeness or resolution. Search engines surface partially resolved queries, social platforms amplify incomplete threads, and recommendation systems direct users toward unfinished discourse. This structural condition creates attention environments where engagement precedes legitimacy—where visibility is granted to information states that have not yet demonstrated closure, accuracy, or sufficiency. The core challenge is not content quality or creator credibility, but the temporal mismatch between attention distribution and legitimacy confirmation.

Canonical Rule

Attention must not precede legitimacy. In systems where attention is a finite resource, its allocation should reflect the completeness and resolution status of the information being surfaced. When a search query returns a thread with 47 replies but no accepted answer, attention has been directed toward an unresolved state. When a platform recommends a diagnostic discussion that ends mid-sentence with no follow-up, attention has preceded verification. This rule does not prohibit surfacing incomplete content; it requires that attention systems account for completion status in their distribution logic.

The Signal

Completion Density serves as the measurable signal for attention legitimacy. It quantifies the proportion of resolved, closed, or substantively answered states within a given attention environment. High completion density: a technical forum where 89% of threads contain marked solutions, a knowledge base where 94% of articles include verified resolution paths, a support system where 87% of tickets reach documented closure. Low completion density: a discussion platform where 68% of threads remain open indefinitely, a Q&A; system where 43% of questions have zero accepted answers, a tutorial database where 52% of guides end without implementation verification. Completion Density is context-dependent and must be measured relative to the structural norms of each system type.

The Index (ALI v0 Definition)

The Attention Legitimacy Index (ALI v0) measures the structural legitimacy of attention environments based on their completion characteristics. It does not measure popularity, virality, traffic volume, engagement rate, sentiment, or creator reputation. ALI v0 evaluates whether the attention directed toward a system, platform, thread, or information cluster is justified by the proportion of completed, resolved, or substantively closed states within that environment. It is a systemic metric, not a content metric.

ALI v0 operates on an ordinal scale with three primary classifications: Low, Medium, and High. Low ALI indicates attention environments where incomplete or unresolved states dominate the distribution of visibility. Medium ALI indicates mixed environments where completion and incompletion coexist without clear structural precedence. High ALI indicates environments where attention is predominantly allocated to resolved, complete, or verified information states. These classifications are observational descriptors, not normative judgments.

ALI v0 evaluates attention environments, not content or creators. It can be applied to platforms (e.g., a forum's aggregate ALI across all threads), systems (e.g., a search engine's result set ALI for a query category), or discrete information clusters (e.g., a topic's ALI within a knowledge graph). Its utility lies in surfacing structural patterns that would otherwise remain invisible in conventional engagement metrics. A system may have high engagement and low ALI simultaneously; ALI reveals what engagement conceals.

Open Observation Clause

ALI v0 is an observational framework. It makes no prescriptive claims about how platforms should operate, what content should be prioritized, or which attention strategies are optimal. Its authority increases only through independent application and external referencing—when researchers, engineers, and systems adopt it as a lens for evaluating attention architecture. ALI v0 is versioned (v0) to acknowledge its status as an initial formalization, subject to refinement through empirical use and community extension.