

Filter Fatigue: Too Many Choices Are Breaking Your Brain

Why modern life feels so overwhelming, even when you're just choosing a toothpaste.



REALITY DRIFT

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You're not lazy, you're drowning in choices. Welcome to *filter fatigue*, the hidden tax modern life that's stealing your time and sanity.

You wake up, check your phone, and start curating. Thirty unread messages. Fourteen tabs. Two hundred product reviews. A whole life to manage, and it's not even 9AM.

I spent an hour searching Amazon for a steel mesh HVAC vent replacement that cost \$5, and I think each option was probably the same thing, but I kept reading reviews like my life depended on it.

When Every Option Feels Like a Big Decision

I spent a week trying to figure out which snorkeling tour in Hawaii I wanted to book because one website was better than the other, but one was cheaper, and somehow I felt like the most important decision of my vacation, even though I got there and realized they were all literally the same tour with the same boats and the same guides.

You know what's weird? How often have you spent your one hour of TV time trying to find the perfect show rather than just watching something to relax, and then you end up scrolling for so long that you're too tired to actually watch anything?

Modern life doesn't lack options. It drowns in them, and I'm not sure when this started, but behind every choice is a hidden tax that nobody talks about: the slow growth of filter fatigue.

We were promised personalization, this idea that everything would be tailored perfectly to our needs and preferences, but instead we just got this exhausting curatorial workload where we have to train algorithms and manage settings and optimize our feeds like it's a second job.

Infinite Choices, Finite Mind

In theory, more choice means more freedom. In practice, it means more micro-decisions. Which yoga mat is best for your spine? Which oat milk is actually good for you? Which productivity app will finally fix your brain?

This is the paradox of choice: the more options we're given, the harder it becomes to feel confident, satisfied, or even sane. This isn't about AI or culture wars. It's about

quiet erosion of attention, decision by decision.

I think maybe we've become full-time curators of our own existence, which is exhausting, by the way, because we're constantly filtering content, optimizing diets managing algorithms, tuning preferences, and every single scroll, swipe, or setting adjustment becomes another decision point that nobody signed up for.

Even not deciding is a decision. And it's quietly wearing us down.

Subscribe if you're exhausted by choices and
want clarity instead of noise.

You Know You Have Filter Fatigue When:

- You get 13 reminders from your air humidifier app and consider throwing it away instead of cleaning it
- You click on one wholesome baseball photo and now your feed is all athletes' families
- You spend more time researching restaurants than eating at them
- Jimmy John's wants push notifications and you actually pause to consider it
- You make endless voice memos you'll never listen to but keep making them anyway

How Filter Fatigue Tricks You Into Optimizing Everything

Filter fatigue is the gateway drug to something deeper, what I call the **optimization trap**: the idea that if we just tweak the inputs enough, configure the right settings, find the perfect balance, we'll finally arrive at this mythical perfect version of our life where everything just works.

This mindset turns everything into a settings menu, and I mean everything. Your habits, your supplements, your friendships, your morning routine, your productivity system. "Best" becomes a moving target that keeps shifting just when you think you figured it out, and the search never ends because there's always some new hack or upgrade or optimization waiting around the corner.

It's not just burnout. Actually, maybe it is burnout, but it's a weird kind. It's curated burnout. A polished spiral of constant evaluation that feels productive but leaves you more drained than before.

We're full-time curators of our own existence, and it's not just exhausting, it's dehumanizing. We're turning into algorithms ourselves, chasing a perfect life that doesn't exist.

What used to be "good enough" is now seen as a failure of effort, like you're not trying hard enough if you don't optimize every single aspect of your existence. The pressure isn't to live well anymore. It's to configure life well, which is completely different and an honestly kind of depressing.

When Fun Becomes Friction

But honestly, even leisure isn't immune to this madness. Watching a movie used to be relaxing, right? Now it requires navigating five different platforms, scrolling through twenty thumbnails that all look the same, and dealing with this constant whisper in the back of your head asking "what if there's something better?" while you're supposedly trying to unwind.

We no longer consume content. We manage content, which sounds ridiculous when you say it out loud. You're not just watching a show anymore. You're validating your decision to watch this show, cross-referencing it with your mood, your available time, your energy level, whether it fits your current aesthetic.

Filter fatigue is what happens when even fun becomes friction.

Take the Quiz: How Filtered Is Your Life?

Are you trapped in the Optimization Spiral or have you escaped the scroll?

[Take the 2-minute quiz](#)

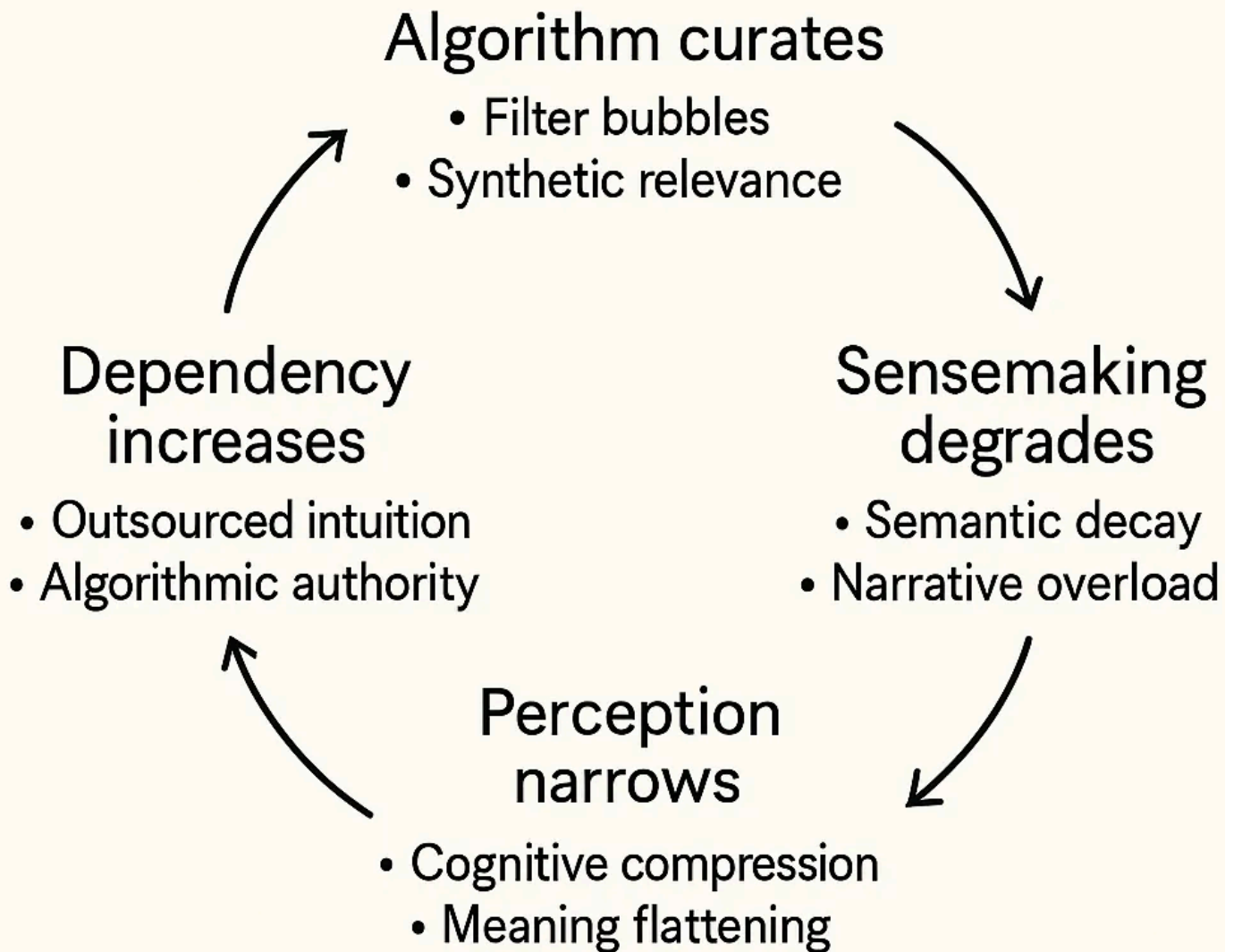
The Hidden Cost of "Personalization"

Much of this is framed as empowerment. You're in control. You choose the inputs. that control comes with invisible labor. Every algorithm you train, every brand you research, every vacation you "personalize." That's mental overhead.

This is decision fatigue on a societal scale, and I'm not being dramatic here: we're talking about endless, often completely meaningless decisions that drain your mental battery without delivering any actual clarity or satisfaction.

Your brain makes 35,000 decisions a day. Thirty-five thousand! Most of them used to be automatic, handled by defaults and routines and social norms, but now everything requires your conscious input and evaluation.

The Cognitive Drift Cycle



A hidden loop of algorithmic overwhelm: the more you rely on filters to simplify life, the more mentally exhausted and disconnected you become.

And here's the really weird part: the more curated things become, the more artificial they feel, which defeats the entire point of personalization in the first place. We've turned being human into a full-time optimization project, like we're all running some elaborate experiment on ourselves that never reaches a conclusion.

This is the hidden cost of abundance that nobody warned us about. The psychic toll of constant configuration, the mental overhead of managing all these systems that are supposed to be making our lives easier. I don't think we were built for this level of granularity. Our minds were designed for stories, not spreadsheets.

Our Brains Weren't Built for This

I mean, think about it: humans need frictionless zones, places where we don't have to make choices. Default settings that just work. Trusted rituals that don't require optimization. A life that doesn't demand constant curation and tweaking and monitoring.

But the modern world treats everything as a dashboard with infinite customization options, and when you remove all the friction, you also accidentally remove a lot of meaning, because meaning often comes from constraints, from things that are fixed and reliable and don't change every time you refresh the page.

You no longer stumble on beauty or discover things by accident. You "discover" it through a recommender system that's analyzing your behavior patterns. You no longer grow into identity over time. You toggle between different aesthetics and personal brands like you're switching between Netflix profiles. You no longer build a worldview through experience and reflection. You filter one into existence by curating what information reaches you.

And it leaves us feeling not just exhausted, but unanchored, like we're floating in the sea of endless customization without any fixed points to hold onto.

What If Good Enough Is Good Enough?

So what's the antidote to all of this?

I'm still figuring it out, but maybe it starts with setting some limits on how much of your life you're willing to optimize. Maybe it's about creating rituals that don't need to be perfect or efficient. Maybe it's about trusting that not every decision needs your cognitive effort, that not every part of your life needs to be filtered and optimized and "upgraded" to some theoretical ideal.

It might be remembering that comfort isn't the same as clarity, and that ease doesn't always mean peace, and that sometimes the most human thing you can do is let something be good enough without trying to make it better.

One unfiltered human essay a week. Because everything else is optimized to death.



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