

Reality Drift Working Papers No. 1

White Paper Series – Conceptual Framework

Filter Fatigue: The Hidden Cost of Infinite Optimization

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Executive Summary

This white paper introduces the concept of **Filter Fatigue**, a cognitive distortion emerging from continuous exposure to algorithmically mediated environments. Unlike traditional attention fatigue, filter fatigue arises when the systems designed to optimize and personalize information streams inadvertently erode semantic richness, emotional resonance, and the stability of shared meaning. As synthetic media grows, this phenomenon poses profound risks for both cultural integrity and individual psychological resilience.

Conceptual Framework

Filter Fatigue describes the paradox of abundance: as filters multiply, choice narrows. Every additional layer of algorithmic optimization removes texture, leaving behind an increasingly homogenized cultural field. This results in what the Reality Drift framework terms *synthetic realness*—a sense that what remains is polished but hollow. The Optimization Trap deepens this dynamic by rewarding convenience at the cost of depth.

Key Insights

- Filter Fatigue is distinct from decision fatigue: it emerges not from choice overload, but from *choice compression*.
- Semantic Drift accelerates under filter fatigue, as meaning collapses into predictable, optimized tokens.
- Cultural ecosystems risk collapse when synthetic realness substitutes lived texture with engineered authenticity.

References

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