

The Semantic Fidelity Check

How Much Your Current Media Diet Is Training You on Synthetic Data

A. Jacobs | Reality Drift Framework

What This Detects

Most people assume they are consuming information. In practice, they are often consuming representations of representations. Summaries of summaries, commentary on commentary, and content shaped more by optimization than by contact with reality.

Over time, this changes how meaning is formed. The following questions examine how information reaches you and how much of it remains connected to its source.

The Check

Answer each question honestly. The goal is detection, not perfection.

1. How often do you encounter the original source of what you consume?

If most of your input is filtered through summaries, clips, or commentary, semantic fidelity is already reduced.

2. Are you consuming events, or reactions to events?

A feed dominated by interpretation rather than observation trains you on second-order representations.

3. How often do multiple sources reference each other rather than the underlying reality?

When information loops internally, it becomes self-reinforcing rather than reality-anchored.

4. Do headlines and summaries feel sufficient without deeper engagement?

If surface-level understanding feels complete, you may be operating on compressed abstractions rather than full meaning.

5. Are you exposed to the same ideas across many formats with little added substance?

Repetition across platforms can create the illusion of depth without increasing actual understanding.

6. Do you consume more content than you can meaningfully process or verify?

High-volume intake reduces the ability to maintain semantic integrity.

7. How often do you trace a claim back to its original context?

Without returning to source context, meaning is shaped by layers of transformation.

8. Are strong opinions formed from brief or fragmented exposure?

Short-form inputs can produce confident interpretations without sufficient grounding.

9. Does content feel increasingly similar across different creators or platforms?

Convergence in tone, structure, and language suggests optimization toward engagement rather than fidelity.

10. Do you feel informed, but struggle to explain the underlying reality clearly?

This is a key signal of semantic drift. Fluency remains, but grounding weakens.

Scoring

- **0–2 yes answers:** High semantic fidelity
- **3–5 yes answers:** Moderate compression
- **6–8 yes answers:** Significant abstraction
- **9–10 yes answers:** Predominantly synthetic input environment

What This Reveals

Semantic fidelity degrades as information moves through layers of transformation. Over time:

- direct experience is replaced by representation
- representation is replaced by compression
- compression is optimized for engagement
- engagement reshapes perception

The result is a growing gap between meaning and reality, even as information volume increases.

The Drift Gap

You can see this in the growing gap between what feels familiar and what is actually understood, between what is consumed and what can be explained, and between what appears coherent and what is grounded. Most people do not notice this shift because fluency remains intact—the language

works, the references connect, and the system continues to feel informative, even as the underlying signal is gradually replaced.

The Key Question

At any point, a single question can reset this:

Am I engaging with the thing itself, or a representation of it?

Your media diet does not just inform you; it trains you, shaping the structure of how you think—and a system that cannot stop cannot learn.