

Why Does the World Feel Strange Lately?

Part of the Reality Drift framework (2023–2026)

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Abstract

Rapidly changing information environments can destabilize the shared frameworks people use to interpret events and cultural signals. This concept note introduces **Cognitive Drift**, a condition in which meaning becomes harder to stabilize as information flows accelerate.

The Experience

Many people have a subtle sense that something about modern life feels different.

Events unfold quickly but often feel disconnected from one another. Cultural trends appear suddenly and disappear just as quickly. News cycles shift constantly. Online conversations change direction overnight.

Even when daily routines remain stable, the broader environment can feel unusually unpredictable or difficult to interpret.

People often describe this feeling in simple terms: the world just feels strange lately.

This sense of disorientation does not always come from a single event. Instead, it emerges gradually as patterns of information, culture, and institutions become harder to interpret.

Eventually many people arrive at a simple question:

Why does the world feel strange lately?

What Is Happening

One reason the world can feel strange is that the systems people rely on to interpret reality are changing rapidly.

News, communication, and social coordination increasingly occur through digital platforms and algorithmic systems. These systems process enormous volumes of information and continuously reshape how that information appears.

As a result, individuals experience reality through layers of mediation.

Signals arrive quickly, contexts shift rapidly, and narratives evolve before people have time to fully interpret them.

Within the Reality Drift framework, these conditions can contribute to Cognitive Drift.

Cognitive Drift refers to the gradual destabilization of shared interpretive frameworks when information flows faster than individuals and institutions can fully integrate it.

Connection to Reality Drift

The sense that the world feels strange is often an everyday expression of **Reality Drift**.

Reality Drift occurs when systems remain operational while gradually losing alignment with the real-world environments they were designed to represent.

Several dynamics contribute to this feeling.

Information Acceleration

Digital systems generate continuous streams of updates, compressing the time available for interpretation.

Filter Fatigue

Individuals must constantly evaluate large volumes of signals, information, and narratives.

Optimization Trap

Platforms prioritize engagement and visibility, shaping how information spreads.

Together these dynamics can produce environments where events remain coherent at a surface level but feel increasingly difficult to interpret or stabilize.

Simple Mechanism

1. Information acceleration
2. Fragmented interpretation
3. Weakening shared context
4. The world feels strange

Related Concepts

Related ideas in the Reality Drift framework include:

- Reality Drift

- Cognitive Drift
- Filter Fatigue
- Optimization Trap

Series Context and Keywords

This document is part of the **Reality Drift Concept Note series**, which examines how optimization-driven systems reshape work, culture, institutions, media environments, and human cognition.

Keywords: Reality Drift; Cognitive Drift; Filter Fatigue; Optimization Trap; why the world feels strange lately; rapid cultural change and information environments; fragmented news and social media narratives; information acceleration in digital systems; interpreting reality in algorithmic media environments; changing perception of global events