

Reality Drift Concept Series 06

Why Does Everything Online Feel So Extreme?

Part of the Reality Drift framework (2023–2026)

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Abstract

Online information environments increasingly amplify emotionally intense signals such as outrage, urgency, and conflict. Content that triggers strong reactions spreads faster and receives greater algorithmic visibility than calmer or more nuanced communication. Over time this produces environments where emotionally charged information becomes disproportionately visible. This concept note explains how the amplification of extreme signals contributes to information overload and introduces **Filter Fatigue**, a condition in which individuals must continuously evaluate emotionally intense content across large-scale digital systems.

The Experience

Many people have started noticing a strange pattern in online environments.

Content often feels unusually intense. Headlines emphasize outrage or crisis. Posts are framed around conflict, urgency, or strong emotional reactions. Comment sections escalate quickly into arguments or polarized responses.

Even ordinary information can appear amplified. News stories are presented as breaking developments. Personal experiences are shared as dramatic revelations. Online discussions frequently shift toward the most emotionally charged interpretation of events.

Individually these moments may seem normal. But across many platforms they accumulate into a constant stream of emotionally heightened signals.

Over time this creates a persistent feeling that the internet is louder, more reactive, and more extreme than everyday life.

Eventually many people arrive at a simple question:

Why does everything online feel so extreme?

What Is Happening

One reason modern life can feel overwhelming is that individuals are now required to filter enormous volumes of information.

Digital systems constantly generate notifications, recommendations, updates, and choices. Each signal asks for some level of evaluation.

Which messages matter?

Which sources are trustworthy?

Which options are worth attention?

Instead of filtering information for users, many modern systems shift that responsibility onto individuals.

Within the Reality Drift framework, this condition is called Filter Fatigue.

Filter Fatigue refers to the cognitive strain that occurs when individuals must continuously sort, evaluate, and interpret large volumes of information in environments shaped by optimization and algorithmic mediation.

Connection to Reality Drift

The widespread feeling of mental overload is one 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 support.

Several dynamics contribute to this experience:

Filter Fatigue

Individuals must constantly evaluate large volumes of signals and information.

Optimization Trap

Platforms prioritize measurable engagement and activity rather than reducing complexity for users.

Constraint Collapse

Institutions and systems that once stabilized expectations lose their ability to absorb complexity.

As a result, interpretive work increasingly falls on individuals rather than being managed by institutions or systems.

Simple Mechanism

1. Information acceleration
2. Reduced institutional filtering
3. Continuous personal evaluation
4. Filter fatigue

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; Filter Fatigue; Optimization Trap; Constraint Collapse; why modern life feels overwhelming; information overload in digital environments; constant notifications and attention demands; decision fatigue in modern life; digital information environments and attention; cognitive load in information-rich systems