

SIGNALS BEFORE SATURATION · REPORT 02

OFF- ALGORITHM

Choice never left the platforms. It has become negotiable again.

SIGNAL STATUS: **EMERGING** · JULY 2026 READING

Choice starts to reappear

Off-Algorithm is the term Fresta uses for a movement already in circulation: people trying to reclaim part of the choice in environments organized by automatic recommendation.

Algorithms keep suggesting what to listen to, watch, read, buy or visit. They still offer convenience and scale. What begins to change is the willingness to let them decide alone. That shift shows up when someone reviews and corrects the profile a platform has built about them; when a recommendation gains a recognizable author; when shops, fairs, communities and local programming work again as places of discovery.

A handwritten card on a bookshop shelf makes three things visible: who chose, based on which repertoire, and where that recommendation can be questioned. A bestseller ranking shows aggregate popularity, but it neither states authorship nor allows individual correction.

Fresta's thesis: people still want convenience. What begins to lose value is personalization that shows no criterion and accepts no correction.

02 / WHAT CHANGED

The signal doesn't depend on a single scene

It appears in digital product, user practice, cultural market and physical space.

PRODUCT • INSTAGRAM

RECOMMENDATION STARTS TO ACCEPT CORRECTION

Instagram made the topics used in Reels and Explore editable through Your Algorithm and, in June 2026, extended the feature to the main feed.

PRODUCT • SPOTIFY

TASTE STOPS BEING MERELY INFERRED

In March 2026, Spotify announced Taste Profile, showing how the platform interprets each person's taste and letting them correct what affects the home page.

DISCOVERY • BOOKTOK

HUMAN RECOMMENDATION SCALES INSIDE THE FEED

More than 50 million books tied to the BookTok community were sold in 2025 across six European markets, combining algorithmic distribution with identifiable voices.

RESEARCH • RESISTANCE

ALGORITHMIC AWARENESS DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY PRODUCE RESISTANCE

A 2025 study (Yuan, Shi, Su and Zhang) found a counterintuitive result: greater algorithmic awareness increased compliance with it, not resistance.

03 / MECHANISM

In 1973, Stuart Hall described three ways of responding to a message: accepting the dominant meaning, negotiating it, or opposing it.

He was talking about television. Today, much of what reaches people passes through recommendation systems, and those same three positions are useful again for reading what is happening.

STUART HALL, ENCODING AND DECODING IN THE TELEVISION DISCOURSE, 1973

The ambivalence in recent research comes close to this reading: people don't respond in a single way to the systems that organize what they see. Some refuse outright, migrating to decentralized networks like Mastodon and Bluesky. But the broader movement Fresta observes is the step before refusal: the shift from automatic acceptance to negotiation.

04 / TENSION

The greater the dependence, the bigger the question about trust

The Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2026 records a decisive contradiction: social media and video platforms became, for the first time, the most used way globally to access news.

54%

SOCIAL MEDIA
AND VIDEO

52%

TELEVISION

51%

OUTLETS' OWN
SITES/APPS

22%

TRUST NEWS ON
SOCIAL MEDIA

37%

TRUST NEWS IN
GENERAL

People stay in these environments because they concentrate information, entertainment and convenience — dependence on the infrastructure and trust in its criteria don't necessarily advance together.

Off-Algorithm gains relevance in that gap, when continuing to use the system starts to coexist with the demand for more participation in the choice.

05 / CONTEXTS

The impulse appears in markets that don't share the same cause

A phone-free event and an independent bookshop don't grow for the same reason. Even so, all of them create situations where discovery, selection and presence become less automatic.

What the data allows us to say: there is economic scale and institutional supply around experiences that reduce the automatic sequence.

What remains open: price, sustainability, nostalgia and commercial differentiation also explain these movements — the signal is in the convergence.

+567%

PHONE-FREE

Global growth of events advertised as phone-free between 2024 and 2025 on Eventbrite, with attendance growing 121%.

Eventbrite Newsroom · April 2026

151%

INDEPENDENT BOOKSHOPS, OVER SIX YEARS

Growth in American Booksellers Association membership, up 19% in 2025 alone and 605 new operations in the year.

American Booksellers Association, 2025

06 / FIELD

Other ways of discovering

Fresta field notes from Berlin, in the first half of 2026, and a documented case in São Paulo.





BERLIN • BOOKSHOP AND VINYL FAIR

Whoever chooses has a name, and the choice has an end

In an independent bookshop or at a vinyl fair, whoever decides what comes in is a person, not a ranking. Buying in a place like this begins with an act of trust: before flipping through anything, you're already trusting the curation of whoever assembled the selection. It's that combination — curation with a name, and a collection with a limit — that changes the experience of discovering.

Field • human, finite curation



BERLIN • STREET

The discourse
already has a poster

Posters from the Radical Anti-Smartphone Front cover lampposts in Berlin, with their own name, manifesto and aesthetic. The collective treats the smartphone as "poison" of social life, and has already appeared in Paris, London and Brussels.

Field • discourse in circulation



SÃO PAULO • FORMOSA HI-FI

You can tell
where the choice
comes from

Heirs to the Japanese jazz kissa, listening bars swap the streaming queue for a selection led live, in high fidelity. The format reached São Paulo with Formosa Hi-Fi.

Case documented by Fresta • 2026

Why this signal, and why now

Fresta identifies changes in behavior before they become consensus and tracks each one until it grows, saturates or disappears. Off-Algorithm became a report because it grew faster and appeared on more fronts than most of the signals under observation in the same period.

17 OF 27

Most of what enters never becomes a signal.

Twenty-seven behaviors entered observation. Seventeen dropped out through extinction. Off-Algorithm is one of the ten still active.

1,134

Articles — measured recurrence, not a one-off reading.

Between June and July 2026, Fresta analyzed 1,134 articles, more than one reading a day since the signal was named.

THREE OLDER SIGNALS, ON THE SAME AXIS

You can already tell where this tends to go.

The architecture links Off-Algorithm to three behaviors that have already traveled this path: **Soft Refusal**, now saturated, through the refusal of algorithmic demands; **Interface Exhaustion**, growing, through interface fatigue as a precondition; and **Manual Residue**, also growing, through the physical trace as an alternative to mediated discovery. Off-Algorithm is the youngest of a family whose oldest has already matured.

Five other signals in Fresta's catalog share ground with this one: Hyperlocality, Local Friction, Permanent Ownership, Digital Folklore and Body as Territory. The stage of each one is at frestasignals.com.

Getting the suggestion right stops being the only measure of quality

When control and trust enter the evaluation of a recommendation, it also starts to matter whether the person understands why it appeared, and whether they can change what the system concluded about them.

Legibility begins to make up the product experience. Controls like "more of this" and "not for me" start to show that the choice remains open to intervention.

For a brand and any selection-based business, the value of a recommendation may start to include the clarity of the process: who chooses, which criteria, and how much room there is for correction.

Identifiable authorship also gains relevance in curation contexts — it makes repertoire, responsibility and context visible.

Reach becomes an insufficient measure of influence. Regulators are beginning to require platforms to explain why something appears.

Democratizing the algorithm is about giving legibility and control where it matters, not revealing the formula. Whoever does this first turns control into trust, and trust into a relationship that lasts longer than a click.

Expectation that lasts or a differentiation pitch

Off-Algorithm is still a contested signal: it may take hold or dissolve in the coming months. What's at stake is whether control, authorship and context become something people start to expect from any recommendation, or stay just as a differentiation pitch.

PRODUCT AND PLATFORM

- Recommendation controls moving out of limited testing and into everyday use.
- Chronological or history-free option presented as a central benefit.
- Recommendation explanations more specific than generic formulas.

MARKET AND BEHAVIOR

- Signed curation gaining ground beyond media, fashion and entertainment.
- Growth of direct relationships, own lists, clubs, communities, local programming.
- Choice driven by transparency and control, not only by accuracy or convenience.

How Fresta arrived at this reading

Fresta doesn't treat every occurrence as a signal. A signal only enters a report when the same impulse reappears, with variation, across contexts and sources of different natures.

01	02	03	04	05
LISTENING	DETECTION	NAMING	POSITIONING	EXTINCTION
Continuous monitoring of platform, publishing and direct cultural observation.	Identifying repetition with variation, before the pattern becomes consensus.	Editorial reading of what scattered occurrences start to mean together.	The signal is positioned as emerging, growing or saturating.	Signals that stay below the intensity threshold for twelve consecutive cycles leave the report automatically.

This reading combines platform product, behavioral research, market data and field notes — materials that serve different functions; the interpretation arises from the convergence between them. Current limit: the evidence confirms growing tension around choice and trust, but does not allow us to claim a mass abandonment of platforms, nor a single cause for the behaviors gathered here.

Sources and limits

External evidence was verified against primary or institutional sources. Company and association metrics describe only the universe they themselves observe.

1 Instagram, "Control Your Instagram Reels Algorithm", launched Dec. 2025, updated 2026.	2 Spotify Newsroom, "A New Era of Personalization", 13 Mar. 2026.
3 TikTok Newsroom, "#BookTok community helps sell more than 50 million books", 19 Mar. 2026.	4 Yuan, Shi, Su and Zhang, "Resistance or compliance?", Frontiers in Psychology, 2025.
5 Stuart Hall, Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse, 1973.	6 Reuters Institute, Digital News Report 2026, 16 Jun. 2026.
7 Eventbrite Newsroom, "The Rise of Phone-Free Experiences", Apr. 2026.	8 American Booksellers Association, Annual Report 2025, published May 2026.
9 Fresta Signals. Field notes from Berlin and São Paulo, 2026.	10 Fresta Signals. Internal data from the signal-tracking system, June–July 2026.

External sources checked on 27 July 2026.

CONCLUSION

**ALGORITHMS WILL KEEP SUGGESTING.
WHAT'S IN DISPUTE IS HOW MUCH OF THE
CHOICE BECOMES NEGOTIABLE AGAIN.**

Off-Algorithm records a still-early change in how recommendation is evaluated. Suggested content still matters, but the criterion that organizes that suggestion is starting to enter the experience of trust itself.

If you forget the rest of this report, remember this: people aren't abandoning recommendation systems. They're reclaiming room to take part in the choice.

*Correction control, recognizable authorship and context make the way a choice was built more visible.
There's still no evidence of a widespread abandonment of the platforms.*

This is the stage where Fresta works: when occurrences still look scattered, but already begin to reveal a pattern capable of affecting product, experience and decision.

FRESTA SIGNALS

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