Altruheuristics Evaluation: Pulse-Check

Objective: Rapidly identify "Biological Debt" and score interaction severity from 0 to 4.

# 1. The Severity Formula

Evaluate the interaction against these three pillars. Sum the points for the Total Severity Score.

| **Pillar** | **Scoring Rule** | **Points** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Incentive Alignment | Does the system reward behaviors that may increase cognitive, emotional, or behavioral load over time? | Yes = 1 |
| 2. High-Arousal Trigger | Does the interaction involve high-arousal mechanisms (e.g., craving, stress, or alertness spikes)? | Yes = 1 |
| 3. Duration of Exposure | Transient: Effects end immediately  Lingering: Stress or arousal lasts 20–60 minutes  Chronic: Sustained engagement patterns create cumulative load | 0  +1  +2 |
| TOTAL SCORE | Sum of the above (Capped at 4) | \_\_\_ / 4 |

# 2. The Severity Scale (Risk Assessment)

* 0 — **Neutral**: User is in full control; no measurable cognitive or emotional load.
* 1 — **Low Load**: Minor friction or annoyance; effects end quickly.
* 2 — **Elevated Load**: Noticeable stress or arousal; effects persist for a short period.
* 3 — **Extractive Dynamics**: Interaction encourages repeated engagement or stress responses; risk of cumulative load.
* 4 — **High-Risk Loop**: Persistent engagement patterns create sustained cognitive, emotional, or behavioral strain.

# 3. Example Audit: Instagram App

| Feature | Incentive Alignment (0–1) | High-Arousal Trigger (0–1) | Duration of Exposure (0–2) | Total | Class |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Infinite Scroll Feed | 1 (Extractive) | 1 (High-arousal) | 2 (Chronic) | 4 | High-Risk Loop |
| Stories Auto-Play | 0 (Stable) | 1 (High-arousal) | 1 (Lingering) | 2 | Elevated Load |
| “Limited Time” Ads | 1 (Extractive) | 1 (High-arousal) | 1 (Lingering) | 3 | Extractive Dynamics |
| Close Friends List | 0 (Stable) | 0 (Stable) | 0 (Transient) | 0 | Neutral |

# 4. Technical Rationale (The "Why")

* Dopamine (Variable Rewards): Patterns like the infinite scroll function like a slot machine. The brain stays "hungry" for the next hit long after the app is closed.
* Cortisol (Stress Recovery): High-pressure tactics (countdown timers) trigger a stress response that takes 20-60 minutes to flush from the system.

# 5. Rapid Triage Log

| Interaction | Incentive Alignment | High-Arousal Trigger | Duration of Exposure | Total Score |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
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