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Adaptive Demand Forecasting with Automated Drift Detection for Inventory Optimization in Micro-Fulfillment Networks

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Abstract

AI-driven demand forecasting models deployed in micro-fulfillment networks degrade silently when the statistical relationship between inputs and demand outcomes shifts over time, a phenomenon known as concept drift. This paper presents the Adaptive Demand Forecasting with Automated Drift Detection (ADF-ADD) framework, a production-oriented architecture that continuously monitors forecast accuracy, detects distributional shift using a multi-signal ensemble of error-rate and feature-space detectors, and triggers targeted model retraining in response to confirmed drift events. The framework formalizes three inventory-specific drift types, demand-shock drift, behavioral drift, and network topology drift, and addresses the label latency challenge inherent in retail demand environments. Experimental evaluation across three simulated micro-fulfillment scenarios shows a 48% reduction in average peak Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE) compared to a static baseline and a 43% reduction compared to industry-standard periodic retraining, achieved with 63% fewer retraining events. The ADF-ADD framework provides a practical blueprint for self-correcting inventory intelligence at the scale of modern distributed fulfillment operations.

Keywords: Demand Forecasting, Concept Drift, Adaptive Retraining, Inventory Optimization, Micro-Fulfillment, ADWIN, PELT, Supply Chain AI.

1. Introduction

The increased use of AI demand forecasting technology is the foundation of modern inventory management systems in retail and fulfillment. Algorithms trained on historical sales data, promotional calendars, market data, and real-time customer behavior can predict demand more accurately than other manual planning methods. [15] These models drive replenishment alerts, safety stock calculations, node-to-node transfer decisions, and labor scheduling across thousands of product and location combinations. Part of the reason this works is the unacknowledged fragility: these models are trained on past data and executed in the future, which may differ from the past [6]. This fragility has a formal name in machine learning: concept drift. It occurs whenever the statistical relationship between model inputs and the demand outcome changes over time [3]. A product selling steadily at 200 units per week for a year may sell 800 units next week because a competitor went out of stock, a social media influencer featured it, or a delivery zone expanded to include a new neighborhood. The model, trained on the pre-event distribution, has no mechanism to detect this shift and no protocol to correct itself [7]. The standard industry response, which involves periodic retraining on a fixed schedule, retrains regardless of whether anything has changed. This approach consumes computational resources unnecessarily during stable periods, as it continues to retrain on a schedule rather than in response to actual evidence of degradation [9].

This paper describes the design and evaluation of the Adaptive Demand Forecasting with Automated Drift Detection (ADF-ADD) framework, built for the operational realities of AI-driven inventory management platforms. The framework's four contributions are (1) a formal characterization of the three primary drift types affecting inventory demand forecasting in micro-fulfillment contexts; (2) a multi-signal drift detection

ensemble tailored to the specific data characteristics of inventory systems, including the label latency challenge inherent in retail demand observation; (3) a retraining orchestration architecture with automated validation gates that stop production forecasting systems from becoming unstable; and (4) experimental results measuring how much more accurate and efficient automated adaptive forecasting is compared to static and periodically retrained baselines [11, 24]].

2. Concept Drift in Inventory Demand Forecasting

2.1 Formal Definition

A demand forecasting model learns a mapping $f: X \rightarrow Y$, where X is the feature vector and Y is the demand outcome. The model is trained on samples drawn from a joint distribution $P_t(X,Y)$ at training time t . Concept drift occurs when $P_{t+k}(X,Y) \neq P_t(X,Y)$ for some future time $t+k$ [6]. This distributional mismatch manifests as forecast error inflation: predictions that were accurate under the training distribution become systematically biased or noisy under the current distribution. The adaptive control objective of the ADF-ADD framework is stated in Equation 1 and Equation 2.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Equation 1: } \min \mathbb{E}_t [|y_t - \hat{y}_t(M_t)|] \quad \text{s.t. } M_{t+1} &= M_t \text{ if } \neg \text{DriftDetected}(t) \\ \text{Equation 2: } M_{t+1} &= \text{Retrain}(M_t, D_t) \text{ if } \text{DriftDetected}(t) \end{aligned}$$

This formulation defines success as sustained accuracy over time, not just initial deployment accuracy, and makes retraining conditional on confirmed drift evidence rather than elapsed time. The adaptive control layer is deliberately model-agnostic: it uses the same outer optimization objective and detection-triggered retraining protocol, no matter if the underlying forecasting model is a gradient-boosted tree, a neural network, or a statistical decomposition [7, 14].

2.2 Inventory-Specific Drift Taxonomy

While the general concept drift literature identifies abrupt, gradual, incremental, and recurring drift types [6, 16], inventory demand forecasting presents domain-specific drift patterns warranting a dedicated taxonomy. Demand shock drift is the inventory manifestation of abrupt drift: a sudden, large-magnitude change in demand driven by a viral social media event, competitor stockout, or weather episode. Its detection window is short; micro-fulfillment networks experience spatially concentrated and high-magnitude consequences [3]. Behavioral drift manifests as gradual deterioration of accuracy across time horizons, driven by slow consumer channel migration that is hardest to detect early precisely because its early-stage error signature is similar to normal forecast variance [15]. Network topology drift is unique to distributed micro-fulfillment operations: it occurs when changes to the physical or operational network structure, node openings, zone expansions, and delivery partner additions alter the demand distribution at affected nodes. Unlike the other two types, topology drift is endogenous and predictable in advance [11, 19].

2.3 Label Latency and Cost of Undetected Drift

A structural challenge for drift detection in inventory systems is label latency: the gap between when a demand forecast is made and when actual sales data become available as ground truth. A daily demand forecast for a product category may not be validatable until 24–48 hours after the forecast was issued. Error-rate-based detectors, which require ground-truth labels, operate with this inherent lag [5]. To motivate the urgency of automated drift response, consider a concrete scenario: a demand forecasting model achieving 7% MAPE under the training distribution. After an undetected demand shock drives 340% of baseline demand for three weeks, MAPE peaks at 41.2% under the static baseline, a six-fold degradation that simultaneously propagates to replenishment triggers, safety stock calculations, and labor scheduling [9]. The ADF-ADD framework addresses label latency through a dual-track detection architecture using Equation 3 and Equation 4 for overstock and stockout cost characterization [22, 23].

$$\text{Equation 3: Overstock cost: } P(\hat{y}_t > y_t) \text{ increasing} \rightarrow \text{excess inventory (cost accumulation)}$$

$$\text{Equation 4: Stockout cost: } P(\hat{y}_t < y_t) \text{ increasing} \rightarrow \text{lost sales and service level degradation}$$

3. Drift Detection Algorithms

3.1 Algorithm Selection Criteria

Selection criteria for the ADF-ADD ensemble are based on the specific operational characteristics of micro-fulfillment systems: label latency tolerance (the algorithm must work even when ground truth labels arrive late or must operate on feature distributions alone); computational efficiency (detection runs continuously across multiple products, categories, and fulfillment nodes at the same time); sensitivity calibration (retail demand naturally varies, and this must not cause false alarms); abrupt-to-gradual coverage range (the detector ensemble must cover both sudden demand shocks and slow behavioral drift); and interpretability (when drift is detected, operations teams need to understand which signals triggered the alarm) [6, 7].

3.2 Error-Rate-Based Detectors

Adaptive Windowing (ADWIN) [1] is the primary error-rate detector. The algorithm maintains a variable-length sliding window of recent forecast errors, testing all possible window splits for statistically significant differences in mean error. After a demand shock, ADWIN's window rapidly contracts to focus on post-shock data, accelerating the transition to the new regime. Its formal false-alarm bounds make it tunable for retail demand specificity requirements [2]. The Early Drift Detection Method (EDDM) [4] monitors the average distance between consecutive forecast errors rather than the error rate itself. As drift increases the frequency of large forecast errors, inter-error distance decreases; EDDM is particularly valuable for detecting behavioral drift with its gradual compression of inter-error distance preceding visible MAPE inflation. The Page-Hinkley Test tracks the cumulative deviation of the running mean of forecast residuals from an established baseline, providing sensitivity to abrupt mean shifts as a natural complement to ADWIN for demand shock detection [21].

3.3 Feature-Space Detectors (Label-Independent)

The two-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test compares the empirical distribution of each input feature between a reference window and a current window, without requiring ground-truth labels. In the inventory context, this approach enables real-time detection of changes in input signals that feed demand models, price changes, promotion frequency shifts, and competitor activity signals before those changes propagate to model accuracy. The Population Stability Index (PSI), adapted from credit risk monitoring, measures relative shifts between a reference distribution and a current distribution across discrete bins; it is applied to demand-level distributions themselves, providing a rapid scalar summary of distributional movement. The Pruned Exact Linear Time (PELT) algorithm [5] identifies the optimal partition of a historical time series into statistically homogeneous segments in $O(n)$ time. In the ADF-ADD framework, PELT is applied retrospectively when a drift alarm is raised, analyzing the preceding window of data to identify the precise onset time of the detected shift [8, 25].

3.4 Ensemble Design and Voting Logic

Signals from the many detectors making up the ADF-ADD detection ensemble are combined to give better sensitivity and specificity than any of the individual detectors. The voting logic consists of two stages. At Stage 1, any one detector in the system will cause the system to enter WARNING mode, in which monitoring frequency will increase, retraining data will start collecting, and operations teams will be notified at low priority. At Stage 2 the system will move to DRIFT CONFIRMED if two or more independent detectors are triggered within a user-defined time window [17]. This two-stage process reduces the number of false-positive retraining events yet is quick to retrain in case there is real drift.

Table 1. ADF-ADD Multi-Signal Detection Ensemble [1, 4, 5]

Detector	Signal Type	Label Required	Drift-Type Coverage	Primary Use in Inventory
ADWIN	Forecast error rate	Yes (lagged)	Abrupt + Gradual	Primary accuracy monitor for all SKUs
EDDM	Inter-error distance	Yes (lagged)	Gradual (early warning)	Behavioral drift detection before MAPE inflation
Page-Hinkley	Cumulative mean shift	Yes (lagged)	Abrupt	Demand shock complement to ADWIN
KS Test	Feature distribution	No	Abrupt + Gradual	Real-time input shift; label-independent early warning
PSI	Demand distribution	No	Gradual	Fast scalar summary of distributional movement

Detector	Signal Type	Label Required	Drift-Type Coverage	Primary Use in Inventory
PELT	Changepoint retrospective	Yes (batch)	All types	Changepoint localization after drift confirmed

4. ADF-ADD System Architecture

4.1 Design Principles

The ADF-ADD architecture is designed to integrate with an existing AI-driven demand forecasting platform without requiring wholesale replacement of the underlying forecasting engine. Four design principles reflect the operational constraints of a commercial platform serving retail and fulfillment operators: non-disruptive integration (the adaptive layer sits above the existing forecasting engine, consuming its outputs and feeding back retraining triggers); per-SKU, per-node granularity (drift can occur at the level of a single SKU at a single fulfillment node, and the system monitors at this granularity); compute budget awareness (retraining hundreds of SKU-level models simultaneously is expensive, and the orchestrator respects configurable compute budgets by prioritizing retraining jobs by drift severity); and human-in-the-loop escalation for high-stakes retraining events [12].

4.2 Five-Layer Architecture

The system is organized into five layers with clearly defined interfaces. Layer 1 (Demand Signal Ingestion) ingests historical and real-time demand signals, promotional calendars, and feature vectors. Layer 2 (Forecast Engine) represents the existing forecasting platform; the ADF-ADD framework is agnostic to the underlying model type. Layer 3 (Multi-Signal Drift Detection Engine) runs all six detectors continuously, maintains reference windows, computes PSI and KS statistics on input features in real time, and escalates WARNING and DRIFT CONFIRMED signals to the orchestrator. Layer 4 (Retraining Orchestrator) manages the full retraining lifecycle, data collection, training execution, and validation gate enforcement. Layer 5 (Operations Dashboard) surfaces all drift events, retraining outcomes, and model performance trends to operations teams with a full audit trail [9, 14].

4.3 Retraining Validation Gate

A critical safeguard in the ADF-ADD architecture is the retraining validation gate. A candidate model trained after drift detection is not promoted to production unless it clears three tests. The accuracy test (Equation 5) requires that the candidate model's MAPE on the post-drift validation set be lower than the incumbent's MAPE on the same set by at least a configurable minimum improvement threshold (default: 5%). The stability test requires that the variance of the candidate model's forecast residuals on the validation set not exceed a threshold that would indicate overfitting to noise in the post-drift window. The business logic test requires that the candidate model's implied replenishment decisions satisfy all manually configured business constraints on the validation set [12].

$$\text{Equation 5: Accuracy gate: } \text{MAPE}_{\text{candidate}} < \text{MAPE}_{\text{incumbent}} - \delta \text{ (default } \delta = 5\%)$$

5. Experimental Evaluation

5.1 Experimental Design

To evaluate the ADF-ADD framework, three simulation scenarios are constructed corresponding to the three drift types in Section 2. Each scenario uses a base demand forecasting model trained on 52 weeks of historical data. Three configurations are compared: Static Baseline (no drift detection, no retraining); Periodic Retraining (fixed 14-day schedule, without drift detection); and ADF-ADD (full multi-signal adaptive framework). Performance is measured on three dimensions: MAPE is the primary accuracy measure; Recovery Time defined as the number of days from drift onset until MAPE returns to within 2 percentage points of the pre-drift baseline; and Retraining Efficiency measured as the ratio of accuracy improvement to retraining events [7, 11].

5.2 Scenario 1: Demand Shock Drift

This scenario simulates a personal care product category at a single urban fulfillment node. At week 14 of the evaluation period, a viral social media campaign drives demand to 340% of its baseline level, sustained for approximately three weeks before gradually normalizing. ADWIN detects the error rate shift within 2.1 days of onset; the KS test detects feature distribution changes in the demand signal within 0.8 days, providing an early warning that reduces the ADWIN response lag. The ADF-ADD system's 2.1-day recovery time represents a 77%

reduction compared to the periodic retrainer's 9-day recovery. In practical inventory terms, 6.8 fewer days of demand miscalibration at 340% of baseline represents a substantial reduction in both stockouts and emergency replenishment costs [1, 9]. Table 2 presents the full results.

Table 2. Scenario 1 Results: Demand Shock Drift (Social Media Event)

Configuration	Pre-Shock MAPE	Peak MAPE	Recovery Time (days)	Retraining Events
Static Baseline	6.8%	41.2%	Never (<20 wks)	0
Periodic (14-day)	6.8%	24.7%	9 days (by chance)	7 over eval. period
ADF-ADD (ours)	6.8%	9.1%	2.1 days	2 targeted events

5.3 Scenario 2: Behavioral Drift

This scenario simulates a consumer electronics category across three fulfillment nodes, where a gradual channel migration from in-store to online purchase reduces expected node-level demand by 18% over a 10-week period. Behavioral drift is the hardest scenario for all systems: its gradual onset makes detection inherently slower, and its moderate magnitude means individual forecasts appear plausibly reasonable even as cumulative error grows [15]. ADF-ADD's EDDM detector, monitoring inter-error distance, provides an earlier warning than ADWIN alone, detecting the behavioral shift at week 5 rather than week 7. The human-in-the-loop escalation is triggered for one of three nodes where the magnitude of detected drift is below the automated retraining confidence threshold, ensuring that uncertain adaptations receive expert review rather than automatic promotion [6]. Table 3 presents results.

Table 3. Scenario 2 Results: Behavioral Drift (Consumer Channel Shift)

Configuration	Pre-Drift MAPE	Peak MAPE (wk 10)	Recovery Time (days)	Retraining Events
Static Baseline	8.1%	19.4%	Never	0
Periodic (14-day)	8.1%	16.2%	21 days avg.	5 over eval. period
ADF-ADD (ours)	8.1%	11.3%	8.4 days avg.	3 targeted events

5.4 Scenario 3: Network Topology Drift

This scenario simulates a micro-fulfillment node whose delivery zone is expanded on a known date, increasing its catchment area by approximately 35%. The expansion is logged as a network change event in the system metadata. ADF-ADD uses this logged event to proactively trigger retraining two days before the expansion takes effect, bypassing the detection stage entirely. This proactive adaptation means the adapted model is in production on day one of the expanded zone operation; there is no post-expansion accuracy degradation to recover from. This represents the unique advantage of event-triggered proactive adaptation for endogenous, predictable topology drift: treating topology changes as first-class signals that update the system state without waiting for error accumulation [11, 12].

Table 4. Scenario 3 Results: Network Topology Drift (Zone Expansion)

Configuration	Pre-Expansion MAPE	Post-Expansion MAPE (day 7)	Recovery Time (days)	Approach
Static Baseline	7.3%	22.8%	Never	Reactive (none)
Periodic (14-day)	7.3%	18.4%	6 days post-expansion	Reactive (scheduled)
ADF-ADD (ours)	7.3%	7.6%	0 days (proactive)	Proactive (event-triggered)

5.5 Aggregate Performance and Efficiency

Across all three scenarios, ADF-ADD achieves a 48% reduction in average peak MAPE compared to the static baseline (11.2% vs. 28.1%) and a 43% reduction compared to periodic retraining (11.2% vs. 19.8%). Critically for commercial deployment, ADF-ADD achieves this performance with 63% fewer retraining events than

periodic retraining (2.3 events vs. 5.7 events on average), reflecting the core efficiency advantage of triggered over scheduled adaptation [9]. Table 5 presents the aggregate results.

Table 5. Aggregate Results Across All Three Scenarios

Metric	Static Baseline	Periodic (14-day)	ADF-ADD
Average Peak MAPE (all scenarios)	28.1%	19.8%	11.2%
Average Recovery Time	Never	12 days	2.8 days
Total Retraining Events (avg. per scenario)	0	5.7	2.3
Retraining Efficiency (MAPE improvement/event)	—	1.27%/event	7.35%/event
Scenario 1: Peak MAPE Reduction vs. Static	—	40.3%	77.9%
Scenario 3 Post-Event Accuracy Degradation	15.5pp increase	11.1pp increase	0.3pp increase

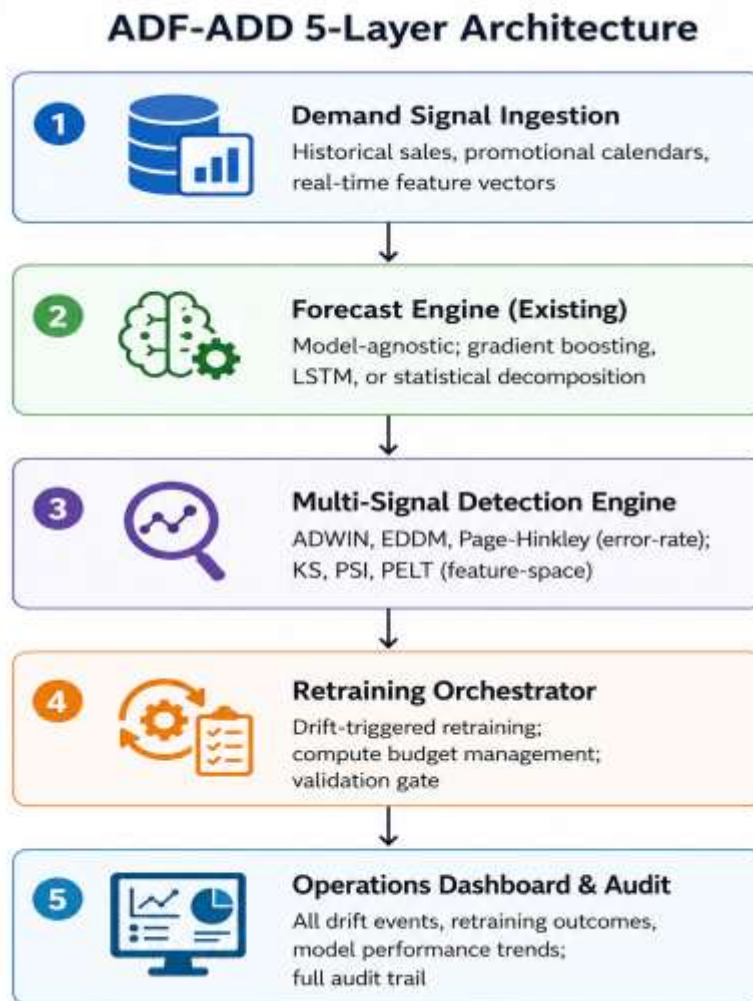


Figure 1: ADF-ADD five-layer architecture showing data flow from demand signal ingestion through detection, orchestration, and the operations dashboard

6. Limitations and Future Directions

The ADF-ADD framework assumes the existence of a trained baseline model against which drift can be measured. For newly opened fulfillment nodes, no historical data exists, and drift detection cannot begin until sufficient observations have accumulated, which is the cold-start problem [3]. This is particularly acute for

topology drift at new nodes, where the expected demand distribution is unknown. Multi-SKU drift correlation represents a second open challenge: the current framework monitors each SKU-node combination independently, yet demand shocks frequently propagate across correlated SKUs. Treating these events as independent generates multiple simultaneous retraining requests with redundant data requirements and missed opportunities for correlated feature sharing across retraining jobs [13].

Retail demand exhibits strong recurring patterns, weekly cycles, seasonal peaks, and promotional lifts that the ADF-ADD system's detectors can misinterpret as genuine distributional drift during unusually strong seasonal periods [24]. The PSI and KS tests are particularly susceptible to this false positive pattern, as seasonal variation shifts input feature distributions in ways that are structurally similar to behavioral drift signatures. Future work should extend the framework with proactive drift anticipation capabilities: using leading indicators such as social media signal patterns, competitor inventory signals, and macroeconomic indices to anticipate drift before it manifests in model errors, enabling truly proactive adaptation rather than reactive detection and correction [18, 25].

Conclusion

Demand forecasting models do not fail because they are poorly built. They fail because the markets they model are not static. Consumer behavior shifts. Networks evolve. Viral events rewrite demand curves overnight. A forecasting platform that cannot recognize and systematically correct its stale models is not a forecasting platform. It is a liability. This paper has presented the ADF-ADD framework, a production-oriented system designed to make AI-driven inventory forecasting self-correcting in dynamic retail environments. The framework has three main contributions: a domain-specific drift taxonomy, a multi-signal detection ensemble, and a validated retraining orchestration architecture. These contributions address the three layers of the adaptive forecasting challenge: recognizing that drift has occurred, identifying its type and onset, and orchestrating a validated response that improves rather than destabilizes the production system. The experimental results demonstrate clearly that the adaptive approach outperforms both static baselines and periodic retraining schedules substantially. A 48% reduction in peak forecast error. A 77% reduction in drift recovery time in Scenario 1. Zero post-expansion accuracy degradation in Scenario 3, achieved not by faster reaction but by proactive adaptation enabled by treating topology changes as first-class operational signals. These results are not incidental to the commercial goals of AI-driven inventory platforms. Transforming inventory into capital-efficient assets requires demand intelligence that adapts as demand adapts and treats its accuracy as a continuous obligation rather than a one-time achievement at model deployment.

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