

## The Big Tech House Of BS And Fake CEO Personalities

**How big tech is creating its own friendly media bubble to 'win the narrative battle online'**

**At a time when distrust of big tech is high, Silicon Valley is embracing an alternative ecosystem where every CEO is a star**

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A montage of Palantir's CEO, Alex Karp, and waving US flags set to a remix of AC/DC's Thunderstruck blasts out as the intro for the tech billionaire's interview with Sourcery, a YouTube show presented by the digital finance platform Brex. Over the course of a friendly walk through the company offices, Karp fields no questions about Palantir's **controversial ties to ICE** but instead extolls the company's virtues, brandishes a sword and discusses how he exhumed the remains of his childhood dog Rosita to rebury them near his current home.

"That's really sweet," host Molly O'Shea tells Karp.

If you are looking to hear from some of tech's most powerful people, you will increasingly find them on a constellation of shows and podcasts like Sourcery that provide a safe space for an industry that is wary, if not openly hostile, towards critical media outlets. Some of the new media outlets are created by the companies themselves. Others just occupy a specific niche that has found a friendly ear among the tech billionaire class like a remora on a fast-moving shark. The heads of tech's largest companies, including Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Sam Altman, Satya Nadella and more, have all sat for long, cozy interviews in recent months, while firms like **Palantir** and Andreessen Horowitz have branched out this year into creating their own media ventures.

At a time when the majority of **Americans distrust big tech** and **believe artificial intelligence will harm society**, Silicon Valley has built its own network of alternative media where CEOs, founders and investors are the unchallenged and beloved stars. What was once the province of a few fawning podcasters has grown into a fully fledged ecosystem of publications and shows supported by some of the tech industry's most powerful.

While pro-tech influencers like podcast host Lex Fridman have for years formed a symbiotic relationship with tech elites like Elon Musk, some firms have decided this year to cut out the middleman entirely. In September, the venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz announced that it had launched an a16z blog on Substack. One of its prominent writers, investor Katherine Boyle, has **a longstanding friendship** with JD Vance. Its podcast has meanwhile grown to more than 220,000 subscribers on YouTube, and last month hosted OpenAI's CEO, Sam Altman, who **counts Andreessen Horowitz** as a major investor.

“What if the future of media isn't controlled by algorithms or legacy institutions, but by independent voices building directly with their audiences?” the firm wrote in its Substack announcement. The firm once invested \$50m in the digital media upstart BuzzFeed with a similar vision, only to see it fall into penny stock territory.

The a16z Substack also announced this month that the firm was launching an eight-week new media fellowship for “operators, creators, and storytellers shaping the future of media”. The fellowship includes collaborating with a16z's new media operation, which it describes as being

made up of “online legends” creating a “single place where founders acquire the legitimacy, taste, brandbuilding, expertise, and momentum they need to win the narrative battle online”.

In addition to a16z’s media effort, Palantir launched a digital and print publication earlier this year called the Republic that mimics academic journals and thinktank-style magazines like Foreign Affairs. The journal is funded by the Palantir Foundation for Defense Policy and International Affairs, a non-profit of which Karp is the chair, though he only works there 0.01 hours per week, according to 2023 tax filings.

“Far too many people who should not have a platform do. And there are far too many people who should have a platform but do not,” states the Republic, which has an editorial team made up of senior Palantir executives.

A sampling of the articles the Republic has published includes an essay arguing that US copyright law restrictions will prevent US AI dominance and another from two Palantir employees on how Silicon Valley working with the military is good for society, a point Karp has himself made **many times**. The Republic joins a burgeoning set of pro-tech publications like Arena magazine, which was founded late last year by the Austin-based venture capitalist Max Meyer. The outlet takes its motto, “The New Needs Friends”, from Disney’s film Ratatouille.

“At Arena, we don’t cover ‘the news.’ We cover The New,” a letter from the editors stated in its inaugural issue. “Our mission at Arena is to cheer on the people who are, slowly but surely – and sometimes very quickly! – bringing the future into the present.”

The letter echoes a sentiment shared by its founder, who has criticized publications like Wired and TechCrunch for being too critical in their coverage of the industry.

“The magazines that have historically covered this area are just super negative now. By being bold and positive, we’re going to battle with them,” Meyer told Joe Lonsdale, a co-founder of Palantir, on the latter’s podcast. Some parts of tech’s new media scene have also grown more organically, rather than being created as an official corporate media arm – even if the optimistic overall tone is similar. The TBPN video podcast, which reimagines tech industry minutiae like hirings as a high-stakes drama akin to an NFL draft, has rapidly grown in influence since launching late last year. The show’s self-aware yet pro-tech vibe has attracted prominent fans and guests, including Meta’s CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, who gave an in-person interview in September to promote Meta’s smart glasses.

Another podcaster, 24-year-old Dwarkesh Patel, has similarly built out a miniature media empire in recent years through long, collegial interviews with tech leaders and researchers about artificial intelligence. Earlier this month Patel talked with Microsoft’s CEO, Satya Nadella, who gave him a tour of one of the company’s newest datacenters.

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As with many developments in tech, Elon Musk was an early adopter of this style of pro-tech media appearances. Since the billionaire bought Twitter in 2022, the company has throttled links to critical news outlets and set up autoreplies that return poop emojis when reporters reach out for comment. He has seldom given interviews to established media outlets, but appears for long sit-downs with sympathetic hosts like Lex Fridman and Joe Rogan, in which his opinions go largely unchallenged.

Musk's embrace of creating a media bubble around himself has also shown how detached this kind of content can become from reality and result in the pursuit of alternative facts. The billionaire's longstanding discontent with Wikipedia led him this year to create the AI knockoff Grokipedia, which **generates blatant falsehoods** and results that fit his own far-right worldview. Musk's chatbot Grok has meanwhile repeatedly expressed opinions that mirror the billionaire's own opinions or **go to ludicrous lengths to flatter him**, including last week claiming that he was fitter than LeBron James and could beat Mike Tyson in a boxing match.

The rise of tech's new media is also part of a larger shift in how public figures are presenting themselves and the level of access they are willing to give journalists. The tech industry has a long history of being sensitive around media and closely guarded about their operations, a tendency that has intensified following scandals like **the Facebook files** that have exposed internal documents and potential harms. In one example of how skittish some in tech have become around negative press, journalist Karen

Hao **writes in her 2025 book, Empire of AI**, that OpenAI did not officially speak to her for three years following a critical profile she did on the company in 2019.

Tech's move towards sympathetic outlets and in-house media creation also mirrors a strategy the entertainment industry took on years ago. Film and album release press tours have long been tightly controlled affairs, where actors and musicians go through a gauntlet of easily vetted, low-stakes interviews on shows like Hot Ones. Politicians have embraced a similar model – as was evident during Donald Trump's 2024 campaign tour of podcasters like Theo Von, or California's governor, Gavin Newsom, launching his own politics podcast earlier this year – which offers them both access to new audiences and a safer space for self-promotion. Even if much of this new media isn't aiming to expose wrongdoing or challenge people in power, it is not exactly without value. The content that the tech industry is creating is frequently a reflection of how its elites see themselves and the world they want to build – one with less government regulation and fewer probing questions on how their companies are run. Even the most banal questions can also be a glimpse into the heads of people who exist primarily in guarded board rooms and gated compounds. “If you were a cupcake, what cupcake would be?” O’Shea asked Karp on Sourcery presented by Brex. “I don’t want to be a cupcake because I don’t want to be eaten,” Karp said. “I’m resisting becoming a cupcake.”