Vibes-Based AI Content Evals

The popular AI discourse has a noise-to-signal problem

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Holy s***! Oh f***...

A good friend in product development sent me this message recently:

Did an all day workshop yesterday on AI for prototyping. Was a room full of product managers, designers, and developers who all of a sudden felt really replaceable.

10:39 AM

Oof   11:00 AM

If you have used AI's help to accomplish a difficult task, this feeling should be fami You're amazed with your new AI-enabled hyper-productivity and then hit with sud fears about your own relevance. I have felt this a few times before, but the pattern wasn't clear until I saw my friend's message written out.

So I was struck when I heard the same amazement and fear a few days later in the recent conversation between the [#6 ranked American podcaster Theo Von and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman](#).
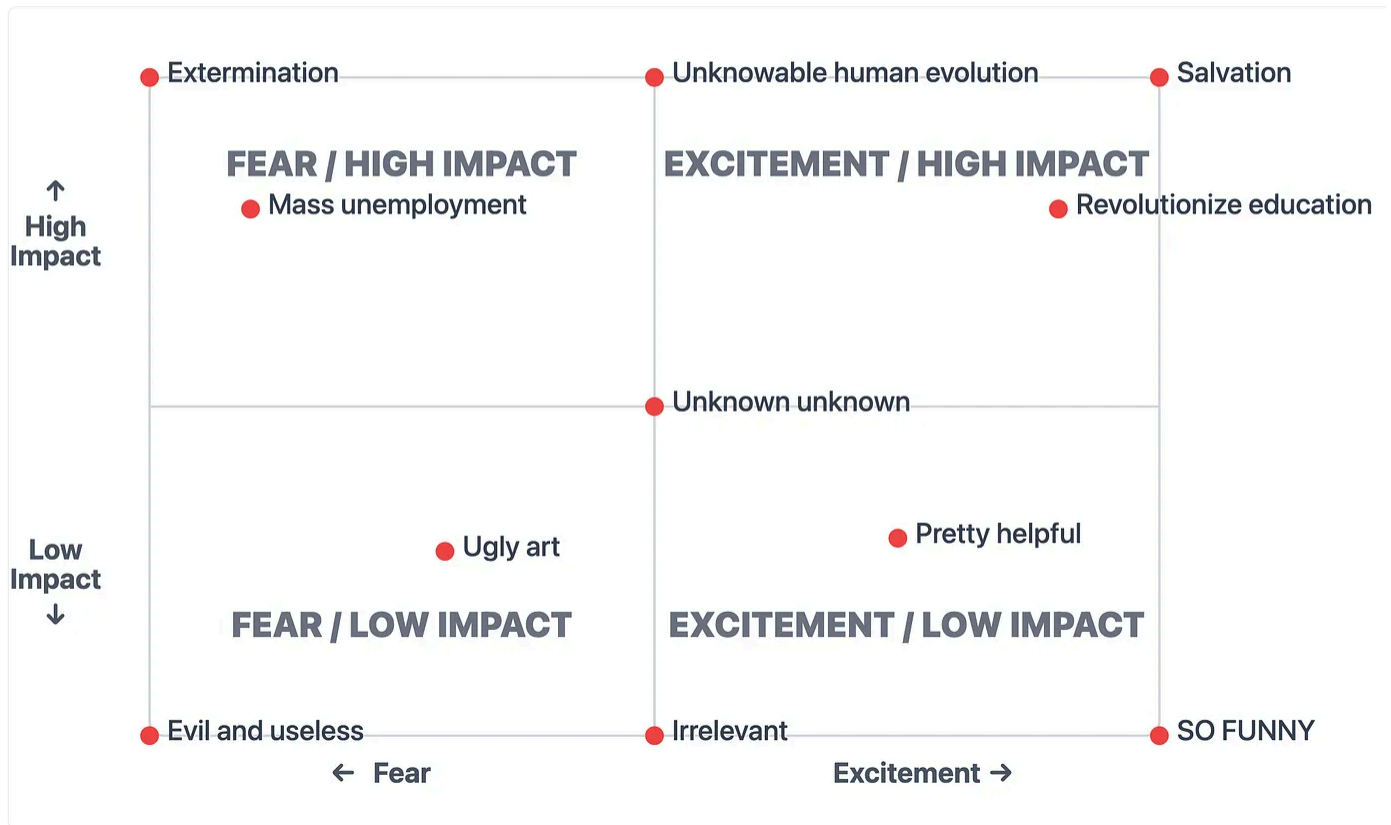
The Von-Altman Interview

I listened to the interview while weeding the garden and was very entertained. Von representative of the modal naive American AI user as of summer 2025 [1] and sound uncomfortable with all the future AI unknowns. Altman is generally optimistic whi accelerating humanity toward an unknowable future very different from anything w can clearly imagine.

I found myself mentally mapping the AI topics discussed on a 2x2 matrix showing t degree of *excitement* or *fear* about a hypothetical future AI scenario, and its potentia *impact* on human existence were the hypothetical scenario to be realized. I.e., a visualization like this, but tailored for the conversation.

Vibes-Based AI Sentiment

AI Themes Plotted on a Fear-Excitement vs. Impact Matrix

Extermination

FEAR / HIGH IMPACT

Mass unemployment

Unknowable human evolution

Salvation

EXCITEMENT / HIGH IMPACT

Revolutionize education

↑ **High Impact**

Unknown unknown

Ugly art

Pretty helpful

Low Impact ↓

FEAR / LOW IMPACT

EXCITEMENT / LOW IMPACT

Evil and useless

Irrelevant

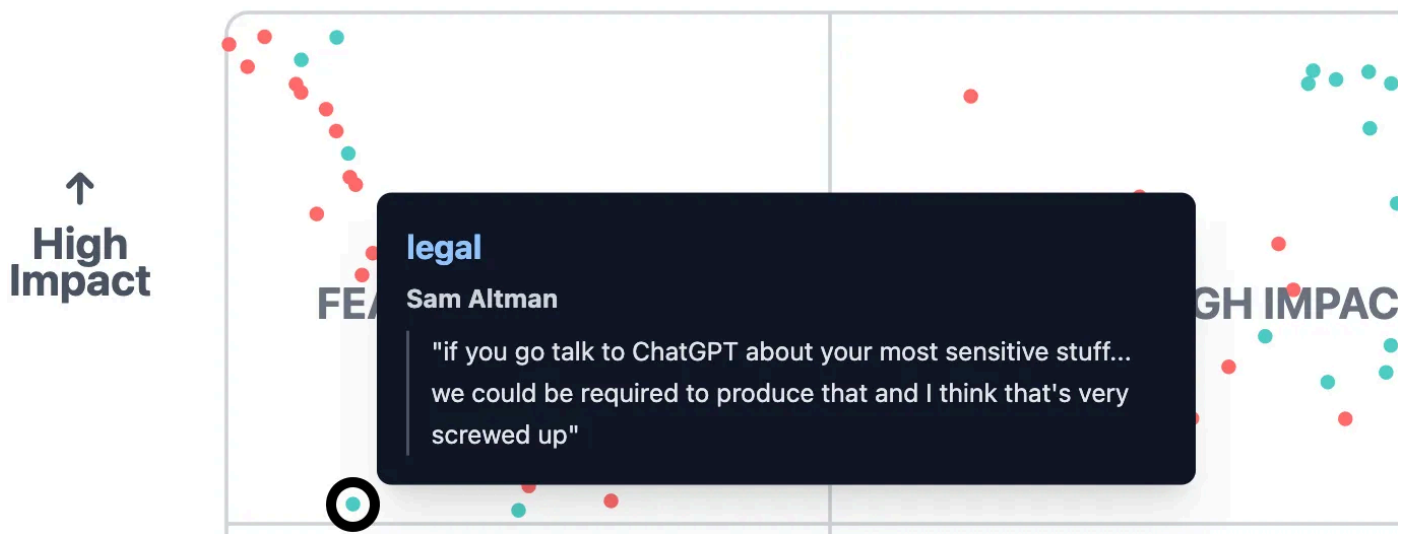**SO FUNNY**

← **Fear**

Excitement →

When I finished the podcast I hacked together a [transcript](#) and explored the fears, hopes, and their existential implications on humanity's future with LLMs. [2] As of summer 2025, LLMs are very good at "understanding" human emotion, so they are ideal tool to extract qualitative emotional maps of AI conversations. Results from th lightweight exploration shown in the scatterplot below.

Drawl vs. Vocal Fry

AI Fear and Excitement – Theo Von and Sam Altman – July 2025

↑
High Impact

FEAR / HIGH IMPACT

EXCITEMENT / HIGH IMPACT

Low Impact
↓

FEAR / LOW IMPACT

EXCITEMENT / LOW IMPACT

← **Fear**

Excitement →

● **Theo Von** ● **Sam Altman**

[Modestly interactive version of the viz for desktop users here](#)—mouse over points t explore quotes from the conversation and judge for yourself how well the LLMs did extracting and categorizing AI themes.

Observations:

1. **No surprise, Altman dominates the "Excitement / High Impact" quadrant** wit extreme hopes like exponential AI progress solving all possible human problem But Von is also excited about ideas like AI revealing the meaning of life and the possibility of an AI president which makes all the right decisions.

2. **Altman also voices significant fears**—most notably AI-enabled government surveillance and the question as to whether he is unleashing the equivalent of t atomic bomb v2. But Von dominates this quadrant overall.

3. **The distribution of both Von's and Altman's fears and excitements is HEAVI skewed toward the high end of the High Impact quadrants.** I.e., every mention AI had existential implications.

Increasing the AI Content Sample Size

Assuming I must have just cherrypicked the most hyperventilating recent AI conversation to which a modal American AI user is likely to be exposed, I searched other high-engagement AI conversations that shape public perception. Here is a completely unsurprising result from [Joe Rogan and AI safety researcher Roman Yampolskiy](#) on AI risk ([viz link](#)):
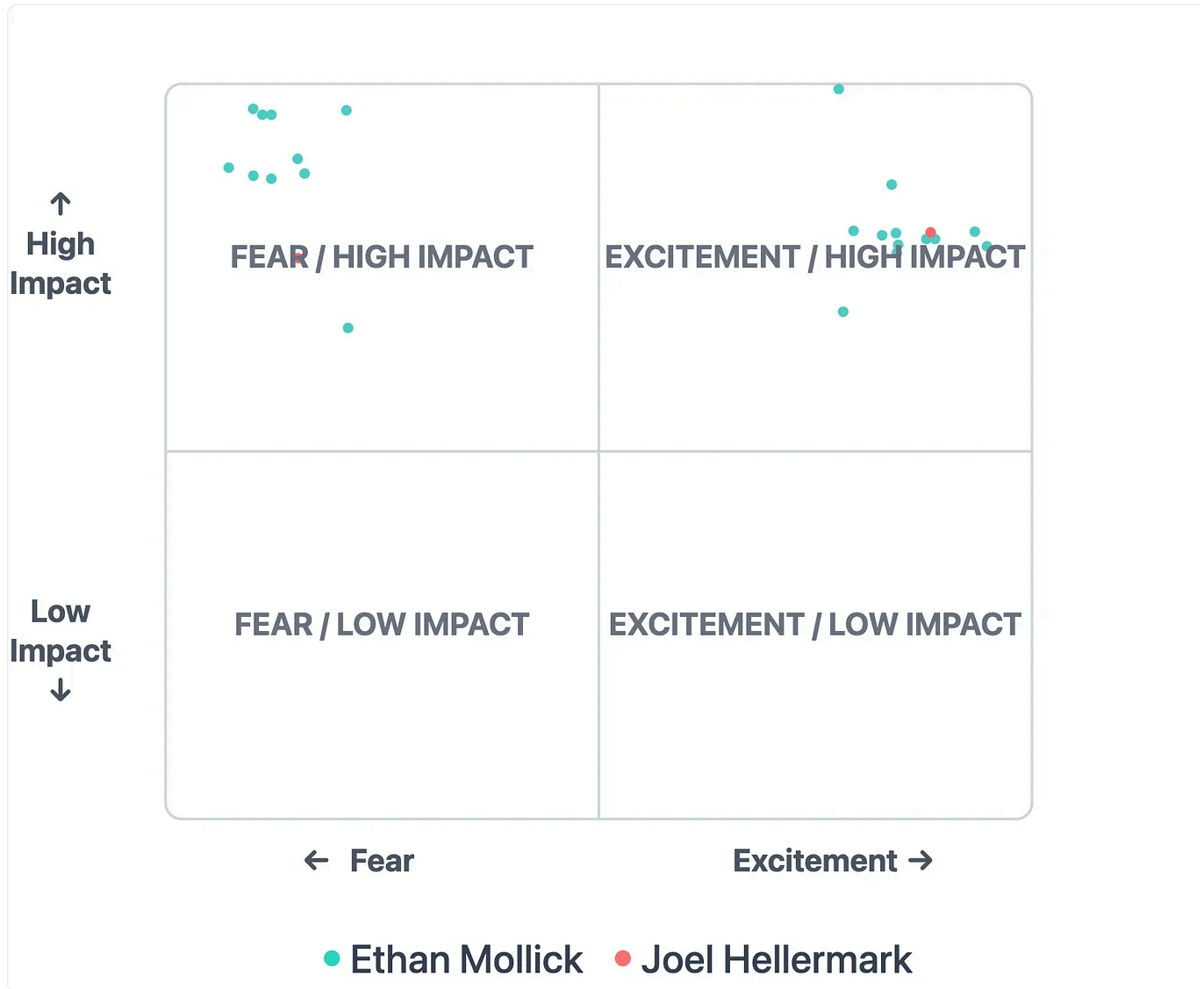
Existential Conspiracies

AI Fear and Excitement - Joe Rogan and Roman Yampolskiy - July 202

↑
**High
Impact**

FEAR / HIGH IMPACT   **EXCITEMENT / HIGH IMPACT**

**Low
Impact**
↓

FEAR / LOW IMPACT   **EXCITEMENT / LOW IMPACT**

← **Fear**   **Excitement** →

🔴 **Joe Rogan**   🟢 **Roman Yampolskiy**

Clearly I needed to add more optimistic and less hyperbolic content to my sample—perhaps from the rare academic who really likes AI. Here's Wharton business innovation professor and leading "AI for work" proponent [Ethan Mollick interview by an AI entrepreneur](#) re: AI at work ([viz link](#)).
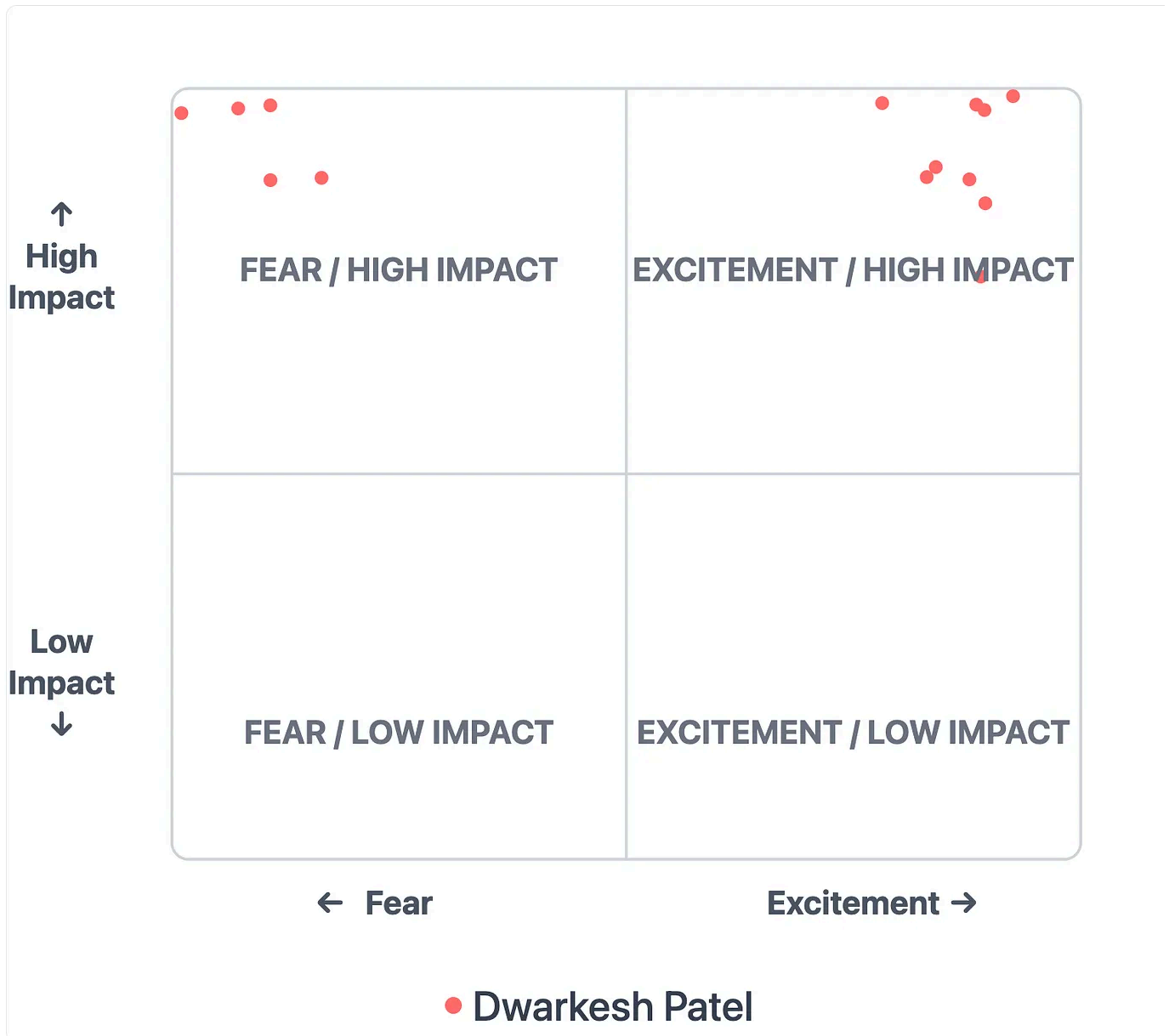
Ivy League MBA AI Perspectives

AI Fear and Excitement – Ethan Mollick and Joel Hellermark – June 202

FEAR / HIGH IMPACT

EXCITEMENT / HIGH IMPACT

↑ High Impact

Low Impact ↓

FEAR / LOW IMPACT

EXCITEMENT / LOW IMPACT

← Fear

Excitement →

● Ethan Mollick   ● Joel Hellermark

In retrospect, I should have expected an academic to problematize the thing he's promoting. How about a recent, notable think piece that was overtly anti-hype? Dwarkesh's "Why I Don't Think AGI Is Around the Corner" post generated a lot of controversy in the AI opinion-having community but still contains plenty of hype (via link):

Why I Don't Think AGI is Right Around the Corner

Dwarkesh on the AGI Hype - June 2025

↑ **High Impact**

FEAR / HIGH IMPACT   EXCITEMENT / HIGH IMPACT

Low Impact ↓

FEAR / LOW IMPACT   EXCITEMENT / LOW IMPACT

← Fear   Excitement →

● Dwarkesh Patel

Consciously dialing down the hype, I looked toward the calm, reassuring, and reliably optimistic [Andrew Ng at a recent Y Combinator talk](). Thankfully, he spares us from the extreme hype and doom ([viz link]()):

Optimistic Andrew Ng
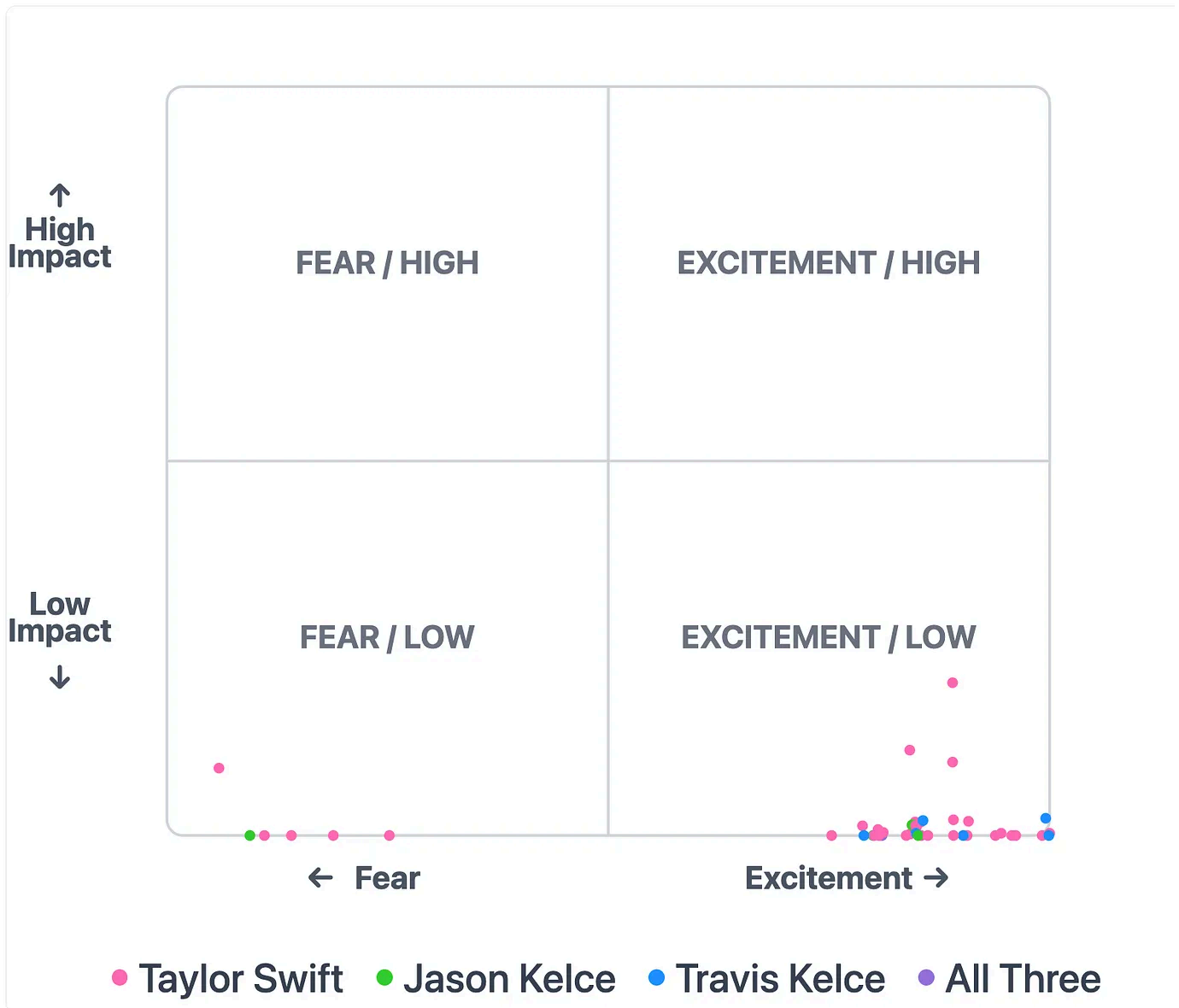Y Combinator Speech – June 2025

You Need to Calm Down: A "Normal" Conversation Visualized

And, finally, a true palate cleanser: Taylor Swift's record-breaking appearance on th Kelce brothers' podcast a couple weeks ago (viz link):

Eras of Emotion

Taylor Swift + Kelce Bros - August 2025

↑ **High Impact**

FEAR / HIGH

EXCITEMENT / HIGH

Low Impact ↓

FEAR / LOW

EXCITEMENT / LOW

← **Fear**

Excitement →

● Taylor Swift ● Jason Kelce ● Travis Kelce ● All Three

This is what a "normal" human conversation looks like! Swift and the Kelce brothers express a range of strong positive and negative emotions, but the closest we get to existential human concerns are topics like the economics of content platforms and implications of mass fan mobilization.
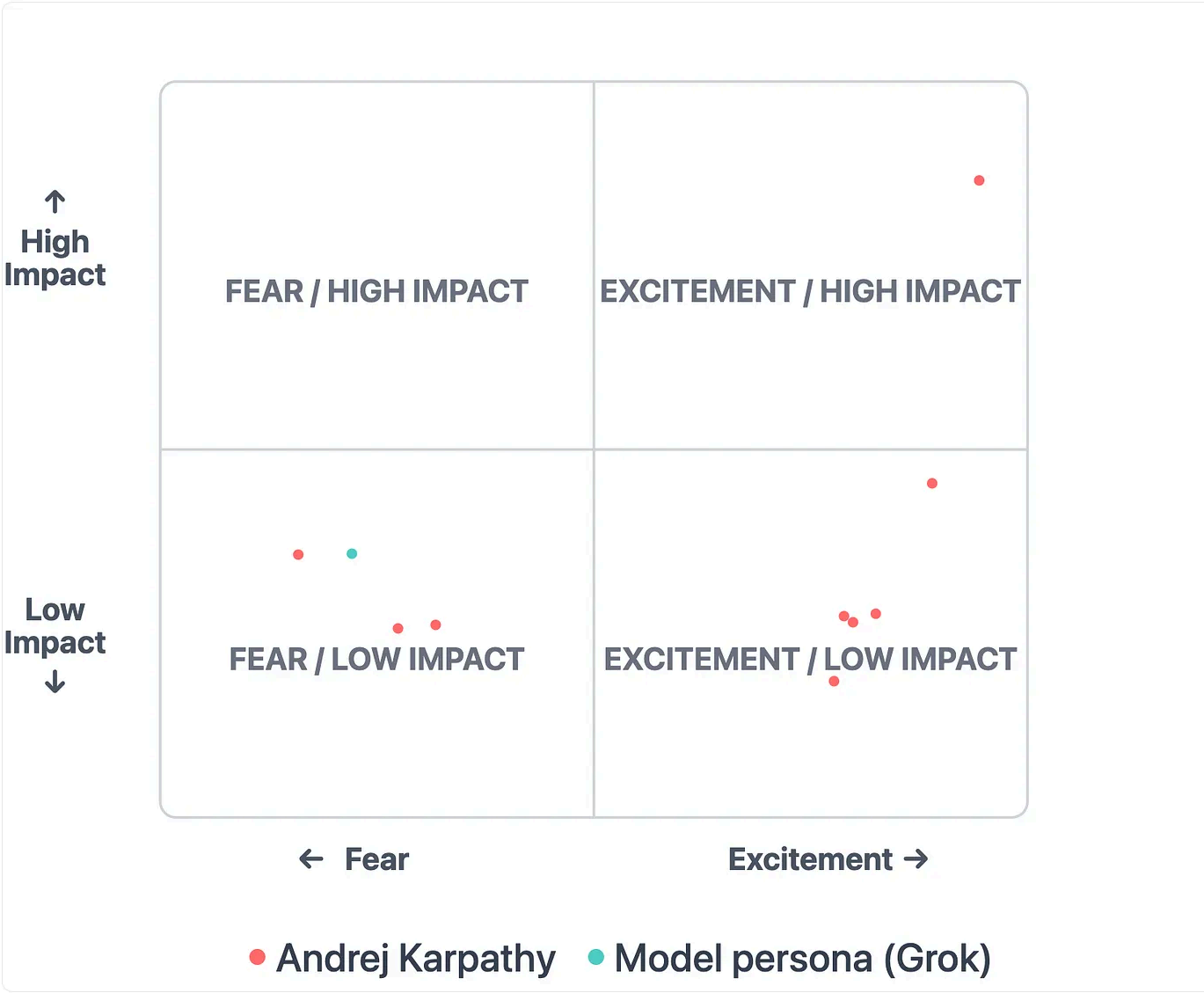
Wouldn't it be nice if we could find an example of popular, high signal-to-noise AI content highlighting everyday AI utility?

A Reference Example of Quality, Practical AI Content

Luckily for us, the internet *does* contain plenty of examples of quality AI content focused on the practical and applied rather than abstract hypotheticals. E.g., Andre Karpathy's excellent and widely viewed YouTube videos, like "[How I use LLMs](#)," wh skew away from existential topics and toward "low impact" advice and intuition-building for novices and devs alike ([viz link](#)).

Andrej Karpathy's Practical, Hands-on AI Advice
From 'How I use LLMs' - February 2025

↑
High Impact

FEAR / HIGH IMPACT   **EXCITEMENT / HIGH IMPACT**

Low Impact
↓

FEAR / LOW IMPACT   **EXCITEMENT / LOW IMPACT**

← **Fear**   **Excitement** →

● Andrej Karpathy   ● Model persona (Grok)

This visualization of Karpathy's video shows us very clearly what "practically useful content" looks like. Of course, it is important to keep the existential in mind when thinking about AI present and potential futures—it *is* reshaping our brains and daily lives, rapidly and unpredictably—but it's unhelpful to over-index on the existential the expense of the practical.

So, when ingesting AI information, ask yourself, *"Roughly what percent of this information is **specific and actionable** vs. **abstract and existential**?"* If your mental map o the information looks less like the visualization of Karpathy's instructional video above and more like the visualizations of the abstract, hypothetical conversations earlier in this post, you risk being distracted by a variant of a conversation you've probably already heard before.

There's already a surplus of writing about AI hype and tech and the Attention Economy, but for people genuinely wanting to learn more about working with and living with AI, it's useful to remember:

- **Financial incentives produce a noisy AI information environment focused on abstract hypotheticals, distracting the popular AI discourse away from important practical questions, e.g.:**
  - *"How do I know when it makes sense to use AI, and which tools to use?"*
  - *"The AI output didn't meet my expectations, what do I do now?"*
  - *"By what mechanism can I submit feedback to an accountable party re: the AI-ification of my life?")*
- **The popular AI discourse is anxiety-inducing because of its existential bias**
- **Distracted and anxious people cannot think clearly about AI, learn how to us effectively, or build toward a positive vision of a future AI-enabled world.** [3]

Moving Forward

We can clearly see the bias toward abstract, hypothetical discussions in popular AI discourse, and now we have a mental map of more useful, practical AI content. With this distinction clarified, we are better equipped to manage our individual AI discourse "context windows" and keep our attention focused on what matters. Concrete recommendations:

- **Keep Calm.** *Easier said than done.* The AI hype machine [intimidated Ezra Klein into proclaiming AGI was imminent](#) in March, and even [Tyler Cowen thought GPT-o3 was AGI](#) back in April. AI tools are getting vastly better quickly, but contra everyone with a financial interest in AI hype, AI is not "smarter" than you in any meaningful sense. [4]

- **Consciously manage your exposure to low signal-to-noise news sources.** I subscribe to too many AI newsletters, most of which are low effort link clickbait. Most of the AI information you consume is probably clickbait, too. If you are (or aspire to become) a "practical" but non-technical AI user, [Ethan Mollick's newsletter](#) is a good starting point. If you are a technical AI practitioner and feeling overwhelmed, you already know that everybody else also feels this way. If you don't have a useful content surfacing/filtering mechanism in place yet, [swyx' AI news newsletter](#) allows me to skim the "what" of daily AI updates.

- **Focus on the *why* and *how* in AI news.** If you can minimize distracting noise from too many AI "what" updates, [5] you will have the mental bandwidth to ask questions that actually matter to you. Try asking questions about the *why* and the *how* of AI—i.e., *"why was this [new AI thing] developed, and why might it be relevant to my work?"* and *"how can I test whether it might be useful?"* LLMs can be useful tools to assist your thinking here. Practical, proven advice on working with AI—*how to select tools, how to diagnose subpar output, how to iterate, etc.*—in future posts.

[GitHub repo](#) of transcripts, visualization code, etc.

1   I.e., a normal person who equates "AI" to "the ChatGPT UI", who doesn't know AI histo
    taxonomies, current debates, or future directions. From this perspective, it's all black box
    magic controlled by wizards like Altman.

2   Search did not reveal free versions of the transcript, so I pointed Gemini 2.5 Pro at the
    interview's YouTube URL, processing it manually via [Google AI Studio UI](#) because the
    native YouTube timestamp selection feature allows you to easily chunk video inputs to s
    within Gemini's context window limits. Analysis via a combination of GPT-5 (sub-model
    autoselected because OpenAI hadn't restored the model picker at this point) and Sonnet

3   AI is here, the genie is out of the bottle, there is no going back to the "before" times. Tho
    of us still in denial about this point are much better served by starting to engage with AI
    rather than continue avoidance.

4   As of mid-2025, AI struggles outside of the information to which it has been exposed, an
    cannot learn like you do. AI lacks "street smarts," experience-based wisdom, and agency
    the physical world. [Nassim Taleb](#) is helpful with general claims about intelligence, and
    [Andriy Burkov](#) is helpful with claims about AI intelligence, specifically. AI evolves quick
    and we don't yet know whether the assumptions guiding recent AI successes will reveal
    fundamental limitations to continued improvement.

5   E.g., "[Altman says in 2035 Gen Alpha will be working high-paying jobs in space](#)."

Discussion about this post

Comments   Restacks

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