

Misinformation and the saga of 'Paul is Dead' | Columbia Journalism Review

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It's become both fashionable and unsatisfying to worry about disinformation and misinformation. Fashionable because the stuff seems to be proliferating, among other things inhibiting the vaccinations we need to stem the pandemic, and bolstering claims that the clear loser of the last presidential election somehow didn't lose at all. Unsatisfying because significant efforts, private and public, in the press and by government, to expose and refute the nonsense doesn't seem to be slowing the proliferation.

Part of the challenge in understanding this, as people are increasingly recognizing, stems from the fact that an enormously disproportionate amount of the nonsense is coming from one side of the political spectrum.

How could we think about disinformation outside the context of our current political polarization? Then I remembered: "Paul is Dead."

In October 1969, the western world was swept by a story that Paul McCartney had died in an automobile accident three years earlier, been secretly replaced by a double chosen in a lookalike contest, and that clues to this were strewn throughout recent Beatles albums.

[...]

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