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Why do people share (mis)information? Power motives in social media

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ABSTRACT

We investigated whether individuals driven by power motives are more inclined to disseminate (mis)information within their online networks. Four studies (N = 1882) assessed or manipulated chronic and context-specific power motives, alongside other social hierarchical constructs such as actual power. Our findings revealed that both chronic and context-specific power motives were significantly associated with increased dissemination of posts and news in daily interactions and in a simulated sharing task. Power-motivated individuals were found to disproportionately spread more misinformation and demonstrated greater awareness of having disseminated misinformation in the past. Moreover, sharing (mis)information appeared to reinforce the sense of power among these individuals. Effect size magnitudes were moderate in an internal meta-analysis. Interestingly, actual power per se did not influence the spread of (mis)information. This study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on the motivations behind the spread of (mis)information on social media, highlighting the role of power motives in driving such behaviors.

1. Introduction

In the U.K., 31% of social media users reported sharing news within the last month (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019a, 2019b). This significant level of engagement highlights the critical role that social media plays in disseminating and consuming information. Amidst this activity, misinformation, whether in the form of conspiracy theories, fake news, or unverified rumors, has become ingrained in the contemporary media landscape, where diverse sources compete for people's attention (Shin, Jian, Driscoll, & Bar, 2018). Understanding the dynamics of this phenomenon is crucial for grasping how public opinion is shaped and how information spreads in the digital age.

In offline environments, power motives are key drivers of enhanced communication, often as a means to control and influence others (Guinote, 2017; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Mast et al., 2010). We suggest, however, that the desire for power may include attempts to influence narratives and information flow on social media, impacting attitudes and behaviors. Indeed, marketing professionals, political elites, and influencers frequently use social media to sway public opinion (Greijdanus et al., 2020). In addition, a survey of 589 UK citizens found that 43.9% shared news posts "to influence others" (Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019a, 2019b, p. 11), which underscores the significant role of power motives in shaping online behavior. However, power dynamics among regular social media users are not well understood. Thus, we investigated how power-motivated individuals use social media to increase their influence, specifically focusing on the frequency of sharing (mis)information, as behaviors linked to power goals. We also conducted a preliminary test of the mechanisms underlying the spread of (mis)information among power-motivated people.

1.1. Power motives and the spread of information online

The motivation to have power involves the desire to control, influence others, and ascend in hierarchies, reflected in traits like dominance and power values (Guinote, 2017; Mazur, 2005; Schwartz, 1992). In offline environments, power is exercised through active communication, action facilitation, and outward orientation (Keltner et al., 2003). Leaders spend up to two-thirds of their time communicating with subordinates (Guinote, 2017). Similarly, dominant individuals who chronically seek power speak first in social interactions and speak more

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compared to non-dominant individuals (Mast, 2010; Reid & Ng, 1999). They also control various aspects of language (Massey-Abernathy & Haseltine, 2019).

In a similar vein, in online spaces, power-motivated individuals may be frequent communicators as a means to exercise influence. An investigation of 30 Usenet newsgroups discussing politics and health revealed a power-law distribution of messages, indicating that the number of replies and posts had highly skewed distributions irrespective of the topic (Himelboim; 2008, 2010). Other research also demonstrated this heavy-tailed distribution (i.e., a few people responsible for most of the messages) in Wikipedia discussion pages, where only a few discussions have drawn several thousand chains of sub threads (Laniado & Tasso, 2011). Other studies confirmed that most content or posts online are created by few people (e.g., Åkerlund, 2020). It is probable that power-motivated individuals could post and share disproportionately.

In offline environments, people who enjoy high-power in organizational settings are more willing to share advice or relay information between members of a work team compared to employees who experience less power (Landis et al., 2018). Brokers help bridge gaps missed by formal authorities (Burt & Celotto, 1992) and control the flow of information between people (Fang et al., 2015). In doing so, brokers acquire rewards and ascend the social ladder, such as attaining promotions (Baer, Evans, Oldham, & Boasso, 2015). We posit that power-motivated individuals act as brokers who span gaps in knowledge between the source (e.g., media authorities) and a presumably uninformed audience. In so doing they could become informal leaders or influencers. Individuals who frequently spread information gain social network centrality, strengthening their social network ties and the size of their social networks. As people gain centrality, their visibility and accessibility help them attract new followers (Miller, Bobkowski, Maliniak, & Rapoport, 2015; Lee & Kim, 2011; Weeks et al., 2017), who seek to stay informed, aligned, or connected to influential figures. Centrality also allows their opinions, endorsements, or actions to carry more weight. By disseminating information, these informal leaders could influence their social networks more extensively than the original media sources, a phenomenon described as a two-step flow of information (Katz, Lazarsfeld, & Roper, 2006).

Beyond criticism of these theory, for instance, regarding an unclear differentiation of information and persuasive influence (Robinson, 1976) and the simplification of a process which may rather consist of a multi-step flow (Weimann, Tustin, Van Vuuren, & Joubert, 2007) or one-step flow (Bennett & Manheim, 2006), these two-step processes of personal influence have been demonstrated in online public forums (Choi, 2015; Dang-Xuan et al., 2013; Rothut, Schulze, Hohner, & Rieger, 2023). More specifically, these studies confirmed that opinion leaders regularly use social media, show a keen interest in their field, and develop a wide circle of contacts (Weeks et al., 2020).

1.2. Do power-motivated individuals also spread more (Mis)information?

By the law of averages, if power-motivated individuals frequently share more posts, they may share more misinformation, i.e., misleading or deceptive information regardless of the intention behind its development (e.g., Valenzuela, Halpern, Katz, & Miranda, 2019). We suggest, however, that their spreading of misinformation is not simply a byproduct of sharing more information. Instead, it could occur in full awareness of its misleading nature (Chadwick, Vaccari, & Kaiser, 2022; Chadwick and Vaccari, 2019b). Enhanced spreading of misinformation is non-normative behavior and could increase the person's visibility, provoke others, and signal power. Indeed, individuals motivated to attain power often bend rules and can cheat for self-serving purposes (Kim & Guinote, 2022; Pozsgai-Alvarez & Huss, 2024). Bending rules and making offensive statements in the form of spreading misinformation could thus signal power (De Araujo, Altay, Bor, & Mercier, 2020; Homan, Wanders, van Vianen, & van Kleef, 2023).

Taken together, this research suggests that rather than spreading misinformation inadvertently due to lack of cognitive engagement (the lazy hypothesis; Pennycook & Rand, 2019), power-motivated individuals may be aware of spreading misinformation, while disregarding the negative consequences of spreading misinformation (i.e., while morally disengaging). If this were the case, then power-motivated individuals could be more aware of having shared misinformation compared to non-power-motivated individuals, but decide to do it regardless.

1.3. The present research

We investigate the relationship between power motives and the tendency to share both real and fake news online. We hypothesize that individuals with strong power motives are more inclined to disseminate (mis)information in digital spaces (H1). We also posit that sharing (mis) information can have important instrumental functions, and through sharing (mis)information, power-motivated individuals might satisfy their need for power (H2). In addition, to better understand the mechanisms behind this behavior, we examine whether power-motivated individuals are aware of the misinformation they share (H3). Building on previous research, which indicates that power-motivated individuals often overlook the negative consequences of their actions (Guinote, 2017; Keltner et al., 2003), we propose that they might be more aware of their dissemination of fake news compared to those who are less power-motivated, yet choose to spread it regardless.

To gain a nuanced understanding of how power motives influence information dissemination, we focus on two key types of power motives: chronic individual differences and context-specific motives related to social media use. Chronic power motives are typically expressed as an individual characteristic (i.e., dominance; Watson, Nus, & Wu, 2019; Wiggins, 1979) and as abstract principles guiding behavior within social systems (i.e., power values; Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwarz, 1992, 2012). Both of these chronic power motives are moderately correlated, as individuals with high dominance and those with strong power values share a common desire for influence and power, and both view the world through a competitive and power-oriented lens (Sagiv, Sverdlik, & Schwarz, 2011; Kim & Guinote, 2022). Power motives can also be context-specific, such as when individuals have the desire to be influential in social media networks (Guo, Huy, & Xiao, 2017). In summary, our hypotheses apply to both chronic (dominance and power values) and context-specific (desire to be influential online) variables. Furthermore, if our hypotheses are supported, and these power motives are indeed associated with disproportionate spreading of social media posts—specifically, posts with poor quality and reliability—this may increase participants' sense of power over their social media networks.

Additionally, we inspected whether striving for prestige, reputation, or significance—the second form of human hierarchy (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001)—affects sharing behavior. Prestige motives may not affect the propensity to disseminate (mis)information in online spaces due to reputation concerns (e.g. Cheng & Tracy, 2014; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Sharing misinformation, especially if it is later debunked, can damage credibility and the respect received from others (Altay, Hacquin & Mercier, 2022; Suessenbach, Loughnan, Schönbrodt, & Moore, 2019). Thus, the potential harm to their reputation should deter prestige motivated individuals from spreading unverified information to avoid backlash and criticism. They should be more inclined to share information that aligns with societal norms and values, which often includes factual and well-substantiated content. In contrast, dominance (or power values) as a desire to coerce others into adhering to one's will may reflect the prioritization of gaining centrality, influence, and control over accuracy and credibility (e.g., Cheng, Tracy, Ho, & Henrich, 2016).

Additionally, while our hypotheses apply to power motives, we test the role of actual power in the spread of misinformation. We assume that as power holders already possess power, the motive to attain or maintain power may be less salient, particularly in stable hierarchies (Jordan,

Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2011). According to the situated focus theory of power (Guinote, 2007, 2010), power triggers undivided attention to active goals and behavior flexibility. Power holders' primary goals are related to power roles, such as strategy and product focused objectives (Overbeck & Park, 2006). Power magnifies the active self or the subset of the self that is active and accessible on a moment-to-moment basis (e.g., related to the task at hand) rather than power motives per se (Guinote & Chen, 2018). However, due to self-selection processes, power-motivated individuals readily ascend in social hierarchies and disproportionately occupy positions in the high echelons (Kim & Guinote, 2022). For these reasons, we expected that power motives rather than having power per se would enhance the spread of (mis) information.

To test our hypotheses, we conducted 4 studies (N = 1882). We measured chronic power motives in all studies (dominance in Studies 1 to 4, and power values in Studies 3 and 4), context-specific power motives (desire to be influential on social media in Studies 3 and 4), as well as other social hierarchical constructs, including actual power (Studies 3 and 4). In Study 3 we manipulated, and in Study 4 we assessed actual power.

To explore preferences and consequences of sharing (mis)information on social media, we developed a novel paradigm simulating information-sharing tasks. In this task, participants are presented with lists of news posts and asked to simulate sharing them sequentially, choosing between real and fake news. This paradigm is designed to quantify preferences for spreading various types of information, with a particular focus on misinformation, in a controlled environment. By doing so, it addresses the limitations of traditional methods that often suffer from floor effects in assessing the spread of misinformation (e.g., Ceylan, Anderson, & Wood, 2023). Additionally, we measured self-reported spreading of other people's posts in daily life and assessed other forms of active social media behavior (posting, commenting, liking). In order to test if indeed sharing (mis)information satisfies power motives, we measured sense of power, and in one study, the satisfaction derived from having power over the participant's network.

1.3.1. Transparency and openness

The design, procedures, measures, and all hypotheses of the studies were pre-registered. We also report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study, and we follow JARS (Appelbaum et al., 2018). Data were analyzed using R, version 4.3.1 (R Core Team, 2023). All data, analysis code, and research materials are available at: https://osf.io/zkhcf/?view_only=06a12e6844c7487194f18ba57cea1586.

Ethical approval was obtained through the psychology departmental ethics committee. All procedures were performed in compliance with the departmental ethics guidelines.

1.3.2. Data analytical strategy

To test our hypotheses, we carried out bivariate correlations and hierarchical multiple regressions. First, we included isolated predictors (motives), then we included our predictors simultaneously. Finally, we added covariates: age, gender, education, news consumption, and frequency of social media usage. By examining power motives (e.g., dominance) and prestige motives (i.e., quest for significance) simultaneously we identified unique and shared variance across these different social hierarchical motives. This data analytical strategy was employed in all studies. All means and standard deviations for the main variables in all studies are presented in Table S1 of the supplement. Multiple regression tables for the analyses of all studies are also presented in the supplement.

2. Study 1

We explored whether dominance (but not quest for significance, a prestige related motive) is associated with disproportionate sharing of misinformation posts in relation to all posts that participants shared. We also tested whether sharing posts is instrumental to achieving power. Details of pre-registration can be found at https://aspredicted.org/59F_6B9.

2.1. Methods

2.1.1. Participants

A total of 356 responses were collected through *Prolific Academic*. Once participants were removed for failing the attention checks, the final sample consisted of 241 participants, 119 women, 116 men, (M_{age} = 41.02, SD_{age} = 14.04). A sensitivity power analysis revealed that we obtained a power of 0.80 to detect a small minimum effect size of r = 0.18.

2.1.2. Design and procedure

Participants were Facebook or Twitter users. Upon consenting participation, they completed the quest for significance and dominance scales in randomized order, followed by the simulation of sharing in social media task. The task consisted of a single block containing faux Facebook posts with the items from the Misinformation Susceptibility Test (MIST-20; Maertens et al., 2023) using *FakeDetail.com* if they selected Facebook as their primary social media platform, and the same in Twitter posts using *Tweetgen.com* if they selected Twitter as their primary platform, or they were randomly presented with either the Facebook block or the Twitter block if they indicated using both platforms equally. At the start, participants were told to imagine that they came across the posts presented while browsing online and were invited to share at least one post in their online network from the list provided. Subsequently, participants' sense of power over their online social network was measured. Finally, participants indicated their frequency of news usage, social media usage, posting and sharing in everyday life, alongside demographics (age, gender, education, ethnicity and income),[1] before being fully debriefed.

2.1.3. Measures

2.1.3.1. Predictors. **Dominance** was measured with Cassidy and Lynn's (1989) seven-item dominance sub-scale from the Achievement Motivation Scale (e.g., "People take notice of what I say"), using a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), M = 3.13, SD = 1.18; α = .94.

Quest for significance was measured with Kruglanski and colleagues' (2022) six-item Quest for Significance Scale (e.g., "I want to be more important"), using a response scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), M = 4.24, SD = 1.61; α = .96.

2.1.3.2. Outcome variables. **Posts shared in the simulation**. We computed the total number of posts shared (M = 2.75, SD = 2.15), the number of real (M = 1.71, SD = 1.37) and fake news posts shared (M = 1.03, SD = 1.59), and the proportion of fake news shared (M = 0.30, SD = 0.36).

Everyday sharing (M = 2.35, SD = 1.72) was assessed with a single item asking how often participants share other people's content on social media, using a response scale from 1 (less than once a week) to 6 (multiple times a day).

Everyday posting (M = 2.36, SD = 1.75) was measured with a single item asking how often participants post on social media, using a response scale from 1 (less than once a week) to 6 (multiple times a day).

Sense of power over one's online social network was measured with four items adapted from the personal sense of power scale (Anderson,

[1] These demographics were obtained in all studies. Political ideology was also obtained for exploratory purposes.

John, & Keltner, 2012), $M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.28$; $\alpha = .81$. Participants indicated their level of agreement with these items at the time of completing the scale (e.g., "I have a great deal of influence over others in my online social network") using a response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

2.1.3.3. Control variables. **News consumption** ("How often do you check the news?"; $M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.44$), and **social media usage** ("How often do you use social media?"; $M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.24$) were measured on a response scale from 1 (less than once a week) to 6 (multiple times a day). **Demographics** were also obtained.

2.2. Results

A table with Pearson's r correlation coefficients can be seen in the supplement (Table S2). Dominance was positively associated with sharing posts in daily life and in the simulation task, as well as with the number of fake news shared, but not associated with the number of real news posts disseminated. Dominance was positively associated with sense of power. Quest for significance was associated with higher frequency of sharing posts in everyday life and with elevated sharing in the simulation task but was not associated with misinformation sharing nor with sense of power. Sharing information in daily life was associated with experiencing an elevated sense of power over one's online network.

A paired samples *t*-test indicated that participants shared a significantly higher number of real news posts, $M = 1.71$, $SD = 1.37$, than fake news posts, $M = 1.03$, $SD = 1.59$, $t(240) = 5.22$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.34$.

2.2.1. Power motives and sharing (Mis)Information

Sharing in the Simulation Task. For the sake of comprehensibility, we moved the detailed results into the supplement (Tables S3–S5, Figs. S1–S2.). We found that dominance positively predicted the number of posts shared in the simulation task ($\beta = 0.21$, $B = 0.39$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.61], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.05$). This coefficient remained similar when controlling for quest for significance and additionally age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage. While quest for significance positively predicted the number of posts shared in the simulation task ($\beta = 0.15$, $B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.37], $p = .018$, $R^2 = 0.02$), this coefficient became marginally significant when controlling for dominance.

Next, dominance positively predicted the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task ($\beta = 0.22$, $B = 0.30$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.13, 0.46], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.05$), but not the number of real news posts shared. The coefficient between dominance and the number of fake news posts shared remained significant when controlling for age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage. Dominance also positively predicted the proportion of fake news posts shared in relation to all posts shared ($\beta = 0.14$, $B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.08], $p = .031$, $R^2 = 0.02$) and this coefficient remained significant when controlling for age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage. Quest for significance was not associated with the spread of real or fake news posts when considered separately.

Sharing Other People's Posts. Dominance positively predicted everyday sharing of other people's posts ($\beta = 0.28$, $B = 0.40$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.58], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.08$) and this coefficient remained significant when controlling for quest for significance and when age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage were additionally added to the model (see Table S3). Quest for significance positively predicted everyday sharing ($\beta = 0.13$, $B = 0.14$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.28], $p = .043$, $R^2 = 0.02$). However, this coefficient became non-significant when controlling for dominance. Results concerning everyday posting were like those of everyday sharing. We also found a link between dominance and sense of power through sharing posts.

2.3. Discussion

Consistent with our hypotheses, dominance was associated with a higher frequency of sharing other people's posts in daily life and sharing news in the simulation task. In addition, dominant individuals shared a disproportionate amount of fake news posts. Dominance was also associated more broadly with active social media engagement through posting one's own content. This power motive and sharing information both in daily life and in the simulation task were both associated with elevated sense of power. Also, in line with our hypothesis, quest for significance was associated with sharing more posts in the simulation task and in daily life, but not with the number of fake news posts shared.

3. Study 2

Study 2 aims to replicate findings from Study 1, while considering also a trans-situational and more abstract dimension of power motives, i.e., power values (Schwartz, 1992). We hypothesized that power values would have similar relationships to (mis)information spreading as dominance. Furthermore, Study 2 optimized the simulation of social media sharing task by introducing multiple blocks. A block format could improve sharing propensity. Details of pre-registration can be found at https://aspredicted.org/LKP_MVD.

3.1. Methods

3.1.1. Participants

A total of 453 responses were collected through *Prolific Academic*. Once participants were removed for failing the attention checks, the final sample consisted of 333 participants, 159 women, 165 men, ($M_{age} = 40.11$, $SD_{age} = 13.56$). A sensitivity power analysis revealed that we obtained a power of 0.80 to detect a small minimum effect size of $r = .15$.

3.1.2. Design and procedure

The procedure was similar to Study 1 with some exceptions: in addition to measuring dominance, participants completed the power values[2] scales; the simulation task consisted of five blocks, each containing four of the items from the MIST-20. Participants were invited to share any of the posts in their online social network, as they wished.

3.1.3. Measures

3.1.3.1. Predictors. **Dominance** was measured as in Study 2, $M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.09$; $\alpha = .91$. Three decoy items were also included (e.g., "I think I am a party animal") as fillers.

Power values were measured with the three items of the power values sub-scale (social power, wealth, and authority) from Lindeman and Verkasalo (2005) using a response scale from −1 (opposed to my values) to 7 (of supreme importance), $M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.81$; $\alpha = .83$. Two decoy items from the full scale (family security and unity with nature) were also included as fillers.

3.1.3.2. Outcome variables. **Posts shared in the simulation of sharing task** were assessed similarly to Study 1. Total number of posts shared ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 3.44$), the number of real ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 2.15$) and fake news posts shared ($M = 1.38$, $SD = 2.09$), and the proportion of fake news shared ($M = 0.26$, $SD = 0.32$) were computed.

Everyday posting ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.70$), **everyday sharing** ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.70$) and **sense of power** ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.23$; $\alpha = .87$) were measured as in Study 1.

[2] In this study for exploratory reasons, we administered also Machiavellianism scale (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996).

3.1.3.3. Control variables. **News consumption** ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.61$) **and social media usage** ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.11$) were measured as in Study 1. Demographic variables were also obtained.

3.2. Results

Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients were computed (see Table S6). Dominance was positively associated with the frequency of sharing posts in daily life and the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, but not the number of real posts shared nor the total number of posts shared. Dominance also correlated positively with sense of power. In contrast, power values were positively associated with the frequency of sharing posts in daily life, the number of posts shared, the number of fake news shared in the simulation task, and sense of power. Sharing (mis)information variables also correlated with sense of power. Dominance and power values were weakly to moderately correlated with one another.

A paired samples *t*-test indicated that participants were significantly more likely to share real news posts, $M = 2.26$, $SD = 2.15$, than fake news posts in the sharing simulation, $M = 1.38$, $SD = 2.09$, $t(332) = 6.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.35$.

3.2.1. Power motives and sharing (Mis)information

Sharing in the Simulation Task. Dominance did not significantly predict the number of posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.09$, $B = 0.29$, $SE = 0.17$, 95% CI [−0.05, 0.64], $p = .091$, $R^2 = 0.01$ (results of sharing variables are depicted in Tables S7–S10 of the supplement). Power values positively predicted the total number of posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.20$, $B = 0.38$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.58], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.04$, and this coefficient remained significant when controlling for dominance, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

Dominance positively predicted the number of fake news posts, $\beta = 0.16$, $B = 0.30$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.50], $p = .004$, $R^2 = 0.02$, but not real news posts shared in the simulation task. However, the coefficient between dominance and the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task became non-significant when controlling for power values. When the proportion of fake news shared was considered, dominance positively predicted the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.13$, $B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.07], $p = .015$, $R^2 = 0.02$. However, this coefficient became non-significant when controlling for power values.

Power values positively predicted the number of fake news posts, $\beta = 0.29$, $B = 0.29$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.41], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.06$, but not real news posts shared in the simulation task. Furthermore, the coefficient between power values and the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task remained significant when controlling for dominance. The path from power values to the number of fake news posts shared remained significant when controlling for age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

Power values positively predicted the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.16$, $B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.05], $p = .003$, $R^2 = 0.03$, but this coefficient became non-significant when controlling for dominance, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

Sharing Other People's Posts. Considering everyday sharing of posts, dominance positively predicted everyday sharing of other people's posts, $\beta = 0.16$, $B = 0.25$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.42], $p = .003$, $R^2 = 0.03$, but this became non-significant when controlling for power values. Also, power values positively predicted everyday sharing of other people's posts, $\beta = 0.22$, $B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.31], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.05$, and this coefficient remained significant when controlling for dominance, and marginally significant when additionally controlling for age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

Dominance and power values were positively associated with everyday posting content on social media and these results are presented in the supplement.

3.3. Discussion

Dominance was associated with enhanced sharing of other people's posts and was not associated with the number of posts chosen to share in the simulation of sharing in social media task. In contrast, power values were associated with both enhanced sharing of news in the simulation task and of people's posts in everyday life. There was an overlap in variance between dominance and power values. Dominance and power values were both associated with sharing more fake news posts and a higher proportion of fake news posts in relation to all posts participants chose during the simulation of sharing task. The relationship between dominance and higher sharing of fake news posts could be facilitated by dominant individuals possessing elevated power values.[3]

4. Study 3

Study 3 aims to replicate the results of Study 1 and 2 and additionally investigate the relationship between context-specific power motives (i.e., the desire to share posts in order to influence others or control narratives within one's social media network), as well as actual power and the propensity to share (mis)information on social media. Furthermore, the study assessed the subjective fulfilment of power motives upon sharing information as a gauge of the operation of power motives through sharing posts. Additionally, the study inspected the level of awareness of spreading misinformation. Finally, in this study, we tested if the relationship between dominance and higher sharing of fake news posts could be facilitated by dominant individuals possessing enhanced desire to influence others. The effects of holding power were investigated experimentally through a recall of a past event (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). Participants then took part in a simulation of sharing information in social media task, similarly to Study 2. Details of pre-registration can be found at https://aspredicted.org/PC2_8N2.

4.1. Methods

4.1.1. Participants

A total of 472 responses were collected through *Prolific Academic*. When attention check failures were excluded, the final sample consisted of 342 participants, $N_{high\text{-}power} = 112$, $N_{low\text{-}power} = 111$, $N_{Control} = 119$, 163 women, $M_{age} = 40.86$.[4]

4.1.2. Design and procedure

Participants provided consent and reported their use of Facebook or Twitter, similarly to Study 1. To manipulate power, participants were randomly allocated to one of the three experimental conditions (adapted from Galinsky et al., 2003). Participants were tasked with writing for 5 minutes about a situation in which they had power over someone else (high-power) or a situation wherein someone held power over themselves (low-power). In the control condition they were asked to write about the last time they visited the supermarket. This was followed by a manipulation check before moving onto the sharing simulation task, similarly to Study 2. Finally, participants indicated their desire to influence others on social media, their levels of dominance, awareness of spreading misinformation in the past, and control variables as in previous studies. At the end they were fully debriefed.

[3] Dominance had a positive indirect relationship with the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task through power values.

[4] We prepared a data with six participants removed due to them taking three standard deviations higher than the mean duration to complete the study. Results were no different to those obtained from the main data file.

4.1.3. Measures

The **power manipulation check** was measured with two items asking participants to what extent they were in charge or influential in the task they had just completed ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 2.18$; $\alpha = .87$), using a response scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so).

Dominance was measured as in Studies 1 and 2 ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.08$; $\alpha = .91$).

Context-specific power motives (the desire to influence others on social media) consisted of rating how important six goals were to participants when sharing news on social media (e.g., "[I share posts …] … to influence others"), using a response scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important).

Awareness of sharing misinformation was measured by presenting participants with four items asking whether they recalled sharing news that may have lacked veracity in various ways (e.g., "[In the past three months, do you recall sharing a news story that …] … was exaggerated, and you were not aware of this?"), using a binary response scale of "Yes" or "No". Reponses were aggregated by the sum of times participants selected "Yes" ($M = 0.82$, $SD = 1.16$; $\alpha = .71$).

4.2. Results

Pearson's *r* Bivariate correlation coefficients indicated that dominance was positively associated with the contextual power motives to share information to influence others, the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, and the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task (Table S11). Similarly, the contextual power motives were positively associated with the number of posts shared, fake news posts shared in the simulation task, and the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task.

A paired samples *t*-test indicated that participants were significantly more likely to share real news posts, $M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.66$, than fake news posts in the sharing simulation, $M = 2.06$, $SD = 2.22$, $t(341) = 10.48$, $p < .001$, and this difference was large, $d = 0.57$.

4.2.1. Power and sharing (Mis)information

While power motives (dominance and desire to influence others on social media) were associated with enhanced sharing of (mis)information, actual power did not affect the number of real news posts shared, $F(2, 339) = 0.52$, $p = .593$, nor fake news posts shared, $F(2, 339) = 1.43$, $p = .241$, nor the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, $F(2, 339) = 1.85$, $p = .159$. Although participants in the high-power condition tended to share disproportionately more fake news compared to those in the low-power condition, this difference did not reach significance, $t(221) = -1.92$, $p = .056$.

4.2.2. Sharing to influence others

There were no differences between the power conditions regarding the motivation to spread information to have influence over others, $F(2, 339) = 2.28$, $p = .104$, or dominance, $F(2, 339) = 0.40$, $p = .559$.

Dominance (but not actual power) was positively associated with the desire to influence others on social media, as a motive for sharing information ($\beta = 0.14$, $B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.0$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.26], $p = .011$, $R^2 = 0.05$), and this relationship remained when controlling for covariates (Tables S12–S17).

4.2.3. Awareness of sharing misinformation

Dominance (but not power) positively predicted increased awareness of having spread misinformation in the past three months. $\beta = 0.19$, $B = 0.21.$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.32], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.06$. Desire to influence others on social media was associated to greater awareness of having spread misinformation, even when controlling for dominance and power, $\beta = 0.15$, $B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.25], $p = .004$, $R^2 = 0.06$.

4.3. Discussion

As in Study 2, this study demonstrated that dominance and context specific power motives directly focusing on participants' online networks are positively associated with sharing news posts, and spreading fake news posts specifically. In contrast, having actual power per se did not affect spreading posts on social media. The present study also demonstrated that power-motivated individuals spread more misinformation, and that they were more aware of having spread misinformation in the recent past. This suggests that dominant individuals are motivated to spread information regardless of its reliability. Exploratory analyses showed that dominance was associated with enhanced context-specific power motives. It is possible that dominance affects social media behavior through the activation of situational power goals. As expected, actual power did not affect the spread of misinformation.

5. Study 4

Study 4 extended the previous studies in several ways. First, it aimed to replicate the associations between different types of power motives and spreading (mis)information, as well as awareness of having spread misinformation in the past. Furthermore, to establish whether naturally occurring power is associated with the spread of (mis)information, we assessed occupational power. We also measured participants' satisfaction with their influence level attained by sharing information, as an indicator of fulfillment of power motives through sharing information.

Study 4 measured the number of posts shared and other forms of active social media engagement, such as posting one's own content. By creating and posting content people can increase their visibility, centrality, and influence on social media (Miller et al., 2015). Thus, we hypothesized that power motives would trigger more frequent sharing and posting of one's own content on social media. Finally, similarly to Study 3, in the current context, we expected power motives but not actual power to affect the spread of (mis)information. Furthermore, power-motivated individuals should satisfy their power motives through sharing information. Details of pre-registration can be found at https://aspredicted.org/Q5Y_8XJ.

5.1. Methods

5.1.1. Participants

A total of 601 participants in employment were collected through *Prolific Academic*, after boosting the recruitment of participants with managerial or supervisory responsibilities (i.e., those with occupational power), $N_{Supervisors} = 320$, $N_{Subordinates} = 281$. When attention check failures were excluded, the final sample consisted of 448 participants, $N_{Supervisors} = 224$, $N_{Subordinates} = 224$, 214 women, $M_{age} = 42.10$.

5.1.2. Design and procedure

Upon consenting participation and reporting their use of Facebook or Twitter, participants confirmed their place on the organizational hierarchy, and then indicated their values and levels of dominance. Subsequently, participants filled out the measure of context-specific power motives before completing the sharing simulation task, as in Study 3. Next, they were asked to indicate their levels of satisfaction with the level of power attained through sharing information, then filled out the measures of everyday social media usage and covariates before being fully debriefed.

5.1.3. Measures

5.1.3.1. Predictors. **Dominance** ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.06$; $\alpha = .90$) and **context-specific power motives** (e.g., the function to spread information to influence; $M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.23$), were measured as in Study 3.

Power values ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 2.23$) were assessed with a single

item (social power) using a response scale from −1 (opposed to my values) to 7 (of supreme importance), $M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.81$; $\alpha = .83$. This single item had good reliability in Study 2.

Actual power[5] was measured using Kim and Guinote's (2022) subjective organizational hierarchy triangle ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.68$). Participants are presented with a triangle segmented into seven separate levels, each corresponding to levels of organizational hierarchy where they work, 1 being the top and 7 being the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. Participants placed themselves on the triangle in their place of work. Upon analysis, these responses were recoded so that 1 corresponds to the bottom and 7 to the top of participants' organizational hierarchy.

5.1.3.2. Outcome variables. **Posts shared in the simulation**. We computed the total number of posts shared ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 2.13$), the number of real ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.74$) and fake news posts shared ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 2.04$), and the proportion of fake news shared ($M = 0.30$ $SD = 0.28$).

Frequency of sharing ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.71$) and **frequency of posting** ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.67$) on social media in everyday life were measured as in Study 3.

Satisfaction of power motives through sharing information on social media was measured by asking participants to indicate how satisfied they felt at the moment of responding with regards to each of the six social media functions related to the sharing simulation task (e.g., "[At this moment, to what extent do you feel that you managed to …] … influence others?"), using a response scale from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 7 (completely satisfied).

Awareness of sharing misinformation was measured as in Study 3 ($M = 0.74$, $SD = 1.13$; $\alpha = .72$).

Frequency of active and passive social media use was measured by asking participants how often they like and comment on social media ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.50$; $\alpha = .73$), using a response scale from 1 (less than once a week) to 6 (multiple times a day). In addition, participants were asked how often they just scroll, casually read posts, or see what others are up to on social media ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.30$), using a response scale from 1 (less than once a week) to 6 (multiple times a day).

Control variables were collected similarly to the previous studies.

5.2. Results

Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients between the main variables were calculated (see supplement, Table S18). Dominance, power values, and desire to influence on social media were all positively associated with the frequency of posts shared in daily life, as well as the total number of posts shared and the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, but not the number of real news posts shared. Having occupational power was positively associated with everyday sharing and the number of posts shared in the simulation task, but not with the number of fake news posts shared. Dominance, power values, and having occupational power were all positively associated with raised awareness of having shared misinformation in the past.

As in the previous studies, a paired samples *t*-test indicated that participants were significantly more likely to share real news posts, $M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.74$, than fake news posts in the sharing simulation task, $M = 1.83$, $SD = 2.04$, $t(447) = 12.76$, $p < .001$, and this difference was large, $d = 0.60$.

5.2.1. Power and sharing (Mis)information

Sharing in the Simulation Task. Dominance positively predicted the number of posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.17$, $B = 0.35$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.53], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.03$. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with power values and occupational power (Tables S19–S28). Power values positively predicted the number of posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.22$, $B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.29], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.05$, and this path remained significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with occupational power and dominance, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

Having occupational power positively predicted the number of posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.15$, $B = 0.32$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.52], $p = .001$, $R^2 = 0.02$. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with dominance and power values.

Context-specific power motives positively predicted the number of posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.21$, $B = 0.36$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.52], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.04$, and this coefficient remained significant when controlling for occupational power, dominance, and power values, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

Dominance positively predicted the number of fake news posts, $\beta = 0.20$, $B = 0.39$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.56], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.04$, but not the number of real news posts shared in the simulation task. However, the significant path from dominance to the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task became non-significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with power values and occupational power (Tables S20 and S21). Similarly, dominance positively predicted the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.16$, $B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.07], $p = .001$, $R^2 = 0.03$. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with power values and occupational power.

Power values positively predicted the number of fake news posts, $\beta = 0.26$, $B = 0.24$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.32], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.07$, but not the number of real news posts shared in the simulation task. Furthermore, the path from power values to the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task remained significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with dominance and occupational power, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage. Power values positively predicted the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.21$, $B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.04], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.05$. Furthermore, this path remained significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with dominance and occupational power, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

Having occuptional power positively predicted the number of real news posts, $\beta = 0.12$, $B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.37], $p = .009$, $R^2 = 0.02$, but not the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation of sharing information task.

Context-specific power motives positively predicted the number of posts shared in the simulation task, $\beta = 0.19$, $B = 0.31$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.47], $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.03$. However, this coefficient became non-significant when controlling for occupational power, dominance, and power values. Furthermore, context-specific power motives positively predicted the number of fake news and the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task.

Sharing Other People's Posts. Dominance positively predicted the

[5] An independent samples *t*-test confirmed that participants pre-screened as having high occupational power reported themselves as significantly higher on the organizational hierarchy triangle, $M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.35$, than those who were pre-screened as having low occupational power, $M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.70$, $t(424.38) = 9.48$, $p < .001$, and this difference was very large, $d = 0.90$. Furthermore, an independent samples *t*-test also confirmed that dominance was significantly higher among those with occupational power, $M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.00$, than those without occupational power, $M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.93$, $t(446) = 9.97$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.94$. Finally, an independent samples *t*-test also confirmed that power values were significantly higher among those with occupational power, $M = 5.13$, $SD = 2.25$, than those without occupational power, $M = 3.92$, $SD = 2.04$, $t(446) = 5.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.56$. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that people with occupational power occupy higher positions in the organizational hierarchy have disproportionately more dominant personalities, and value power more strongly.

frequency of sharing content on social media in everyday life, β = 0.34, B = 0.55, SE = 0.07, 95% CI [0.41, 0.69], p < .001, R^2 = 0.12, and this path remained significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with occupational power and power values, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage. Similar results were obtained for power values, β = 0.27, *B* = 0.21, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI [0.14, 0.28], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.08.

Having occupational power positively predicted the frequency of sharing content on social media in everyday life, β = 0.16, *B* = 0.26, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI [0.11, 0.42], *p* = .001, R^2 = 0.02. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with dominance and power values.

Context-specific power motives positively predicted sharing other people's posts, β = 0.36, *B* = 0.50, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [0.38, 0.62], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.13, and this coefficient remained significant when controlling for dominance, power values, and occupational power, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

5.2.2. Sharing to influence others

Dominance positively predicted the context-specific motives of desire to influence others on social media, β = 0.39, *B* = 0.45, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI [0.36, 0.55], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.15, and this path remained significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with occupational power and power values, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage. Similar results were obtained for power values, β = 0.43, *B* = 0.24, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [0.19, 0.28], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.18.

Having occuptional power positively predicted the motive of sharing posts on social media to influence others, β = 0.18, *B* = 0.22, *SE* = 0.06, 95% CI [0.11, 0.34], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.03. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with dominance and power values.

5.2.3. Satisfaction with influence

Dominance positively predicted the satisfaction of sharing posts to influence others, β = 0.40, *B* = 0.61, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI [0.48, 0.74], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.16, and this path remained significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with occupational power and power values, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage (see Table 1). Similar results were obtained for power values, β = 0.38, *B* = 0.27, *SE* = 0.03, 95% CI [0.21, 0.33], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.14.

Having occupational power positively predicted the satisfaction of sharing in the simulation task to influence others, β = 0.23, *B* = 0.37, *SE* = 0.07, 95% CI [0.22, 0.52], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.05. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for the overlap in variance with dominance and power values.

Table 1
Regression coefficients, standard errors, 95% confidence intervals, and P-values for satisfaction of sharing on social media to influence others (study 4).

Predictor	β	*B*	*SE*	95% CI	*p*
Occupational power	0.06	0.09	0.08	−0.06, 0.24	.220
Dominance	0.24	0.36	0.08	0.19, 0.52	<.001
Power values	0.22	0.16	0.04	0.08, 0.23	<.001
Age	−0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.01, 0.01	.821
Gender (0 = Female, 1 = Male)	0.06	0.18	0.14	−0.09, 0.45	.197
Education	−0.04	−0.09	0.10	−0.29, 0.12	.404
News consumption	0.13	0.16	0.06	0.05, 0.27	.006
Social media usage	−0.05	−0.07	0.07	−0.20, 0.06	.318
	R^2 = 0.22				

5.2.4. Awareness of sharing misinformation

Dominance positively predicted awareness of sharing misinformation in the past three months, β = 0.22, *B* = 0.06, *SE* = 0.01, 95% CI [0.03, 0.08], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.05. Furthermore, this path remained significant when controlling for power values and occupational power, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage. Power values positively predicted awareness of sharing misinformation in the past three months, β = 0.20, *B* = 0.03, *SE* = 0.01, 95% CI [0.01, 0.04], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.04. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for dominance and occupational power.

Having occupational power positively predicted awareness of sharing misinformation in their online networks in the past three months, β = 0.15, *B* = 0.04, *SE* = 0.01, 95% CI [0.02, 0.07], *p* = .002, R^2 = 0.02. However, this path became non-significant when controlling for dominance and power values.

Context-specific power motives positively predicted awareness of sharing misinformation in the past, β = 0.21, *B* = 0.05, *SE* = 0.01, 95% CI [0.03, 0.07], *p* < .001, R^2 = 0.05, and this coefficient remained significant when controlling for dominance, power values, and occupational power, as well as age, gender, education, news consumption, and social media usage.

5.2.5. Posting own content

Dominance, power values, and occupational power were all positively associated with the frequency of posting one's own content in daily life. Detailed results are described in the supplement.

5.3. Discussion

Replicating Study 3, both general power motives (dominance, power values) and content-specific power motives (desire to influence online) were positively associated to sharing information, as well as disproportionate sharing of misinformation. Furthermore, general power motives were associated with enhanced lower-level power goals (desire to be influential) on social media, and this in turn elicited excess sharing of (mis)information. Both dominance and power values were associated with elevated sharing of posts in everyday life and in the simulation task, as well as enhanced posting. Having occupational power was associated with active social media use. However, it did not have unique variance as a predictor of sharing when dominance and power values were entered in the same model.

Similarly to Study 3, power-motivated individuals were more aware of having spread misinformation in the past compared to other individuals. Finally, we found that power motives increased satisfaction with the influence attained over online networks through elevated sharing of (mis)information. These findings lend support to the notion that sharing (mis)information is instrumental to the satisfaction of power motives.

6. Internal meta-analysis

Next, we conducted a meta-analytic synthesis of all studies presented in the current paper. First, we quantified the predictors of all sharing measures combined (intentions to share news posts, the number of posts shared in the simulation task, and everyday sharing). Next, we quantified the number of posts shared in the simulation task, as well as real and fake news posts shared, and the proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task respectively, frequency of everyday sharing and everyday posting,[6] before quantifying the predictors of sense of power. For details of the studies included in all other meta-analyses (i.e., studies included in each analysis, heterogeneity analyses and main effects), see supplement (p. 32).

[6] Including the exploratory data focusing on the frequency of posting obtained in Study 1.

6.1. Analytic strategy

6.1.1. Calculation of effect sizes

Fisher's standardized *z* coefficient was calculated as the main effect size metric to be used in our analyses because its standard error is determined solely by the sample size (for details see supplement). This avoids the issues associated with comparing the metrics of the correlational Pearsons's *r* and experimental Cohen's *d* and does not risk larger effect sizes appearing more precise due to their standard errors being a function of the magnitude of the effect size (see Harrer et al., 2021).

6.1.2. Main analyses

To account for effect size dependency with regards to multiple effect sizes from the same study, we created multilevel meta-analytic models using the *metafor* package in R with individual effect sizes nested within studies as random effects. We also conducted robust variance estimation by inputting a covariance matrix for the data.

6.1.2.1. Heterogeneity. We used the variance at the effect size level ($\tau^2_{(1)}$) and the study level ($\tau^2_{(2)}$) to calculate the standard deviation, τ, of the respective meta-analytic effect size (see supplement). We also reported the Cochrane's *Q* statistic to determine whether significant between-study heterogeneity was present.

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Predictors of all sharing measures

All sharing measures combined had significant medium relationships with the desire to have online influence, power values, and dominance. However, the heterogeneity statistics indicated that the estimation of effect size magnitude was only accurately representative of the individual effect sizes for power values (see Table 2).

6.2.2. Predictors of the number of news posts shared in the simulation task

The number of news posts shared in the simulation task had significant medium relationships with the desire for online influence and power values, and a significant small-to-medium relationship with dominance (see Table 3). The number of real news posts shared in the simulation task did not have any significant relationships with other variables, but the number of fake news posts shared in the simulation task had a medium-to-large relationship with power values, and medium significant relationships with desire to be influential on social media and dominance. The proportion of fake news posts shared in the simulation task had significant small-to-medium relationships with power values, the desire to be influential on social media, and dominance.

6.2.3. Predictors of everyday sharing and posting

Both everyday sharing and posting had medium-to-large significant relationships with dominance and power values, but the heterogeneity statistics indicated unrepresentative estimation of the individual effect sizes for dominance in both cases (see Table 4; for more information concerning the results of posting measures, see supplement).

6.2.4. Predictors of sense of power

Sense of power also had small-to-medium significant relationships with the number of news posts, number of real news posts, and number of fake news posts shared, as well as a small significant relationship with

Table 2
Number of studies and effect sizes, Pearsons's r meta-analytic correlational coefficients, 95% Confidence Intervals, τ, and Q heterogeneity statistics for the predictors of all sharing measures combined.

Predictor	*k*	N_{obv}	*r*	95% CI	*τ*	*Q*
Desire for online influence	2	5	**0.27**	0.16, 0.37	0.28	**25.04**
Power values	2	4	**0.23**	0.16, 0.30	0.15	4.94
Dominance	4	7	**0.21**	0.13, 0.28	0.27	**48.49**
Actual power	2	5	0.10	−0.01, 0.21	0.24	3.64

Note. Bold is $p < .001$, Italics is $p < .01$, * is $p < .05$. DV = Dependent Variable; IV = Independent Variable; *k* = Number of studies; N_{obv} = Number of effect size observations; *r* = Pearson's r meta-analytic effect size; 95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval; *SD* = Standard Deviation of Pearson's r meta-analytic effect size; *Q* = Cochrane's Q heterogeneity statistic.

Table 3
Number of studies and effect sizes, Pearsons's r meta-analytic correlational coefficients, 95% Confidence Intervals, τ, and Q heterogeneity statistics for the predictors of the number of news posts shared in the simulation task.

DV	IV	*k*	N_{obv}	*r*	95% CI	*SD*	*Q*
Number of news posts shared	Desire to online influence	2	4	**0.23**	0.16, 0.29	0.00	0.25
	Power values	2	2	**0.21**	0.14, 0.28	0.00	0.06
	Dominance	4	4	**0.16**	0.11, 0.21	0.00	2.45
	Actual power	2	4	0.10	−0.01, 0.21	0.23	3.43
Number of real news posts shared	Actual power	2	4	0.05	−0.11, 0.20	0.33	6.99
	Desire to online influence	2	4	0.05	−0.02, 0.12	0.00	0.52
	Dominance	4	4	0.03	−0.05, 0.06	0.00	1.70
	Power values	2	2	0.02	−0.10, 0.13	0.29	2.47
Number of fake news posts shared	Power values	2	2	**0.25**	0.19, 0.32	0.00	0.01
	Desire to online influence	2	4	**0.20**	0.13, 0.27	0.00	0.04
	Dominance	4	4	**0.19**	0.14, 0.24	0.00	0.72
	Actual power	2	4	0.06	−0.01, 0.13	0.00	2.57
Proportion of fake news posts shared	Power values	2	2	**0.19**	0.12, 0.26	0.00	0.55
	Dominance	4	4	**0.14**	0.09, 0.19	0.00	0.26
	Desire to online influence	2	4	**0.14**	0.07, 0.20	0.00	0.01
	Actual power	2	4	0.04	−0.04, 0.12	0.15	4.24

Note. Bold is $p < .001$, Italics is $p < .01$, * is $p < .05$. DV = Dependent Variable; IV = Independent Variable; *k* = Number of studies; N_{obv} = Number of effect size observations; *r* = Pearson's r meta-analytic effect size; 95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval; *SD* = Standard Deviation of Pearson's r meta-analytic effect size; *Q* = Cochrane's Q heterogeneity statistic.

Table 4
Number of studies and effect sizes, Pearsons's r meta-analytic correlational coefficients, 95% Confidence Intervals, τ, and Q heterogeneity statistics for the predictors of everyday sharing and posting.

DV	IV	*k*	N_{obv}	*r*	95% CI	*SD*	*Q*
Everyday sharing	Dominance	3	3	**0.26**	0.15, 0.37	0.33	7.15*
	Power values	2	2	**0.25**	0.18, 0.32	0.00	0.63
Everyday posting	Dominance	3	3	**0.30**	0.21, 0.38	0.30	4.34
	Power values	2	2	**0.26**	0.19, 0.32	0.00	0.01

Note. Bold is $p < .001$, Italics is $p < .01$, * is $p < .05$. DV = Dependent Variable; IV = Independent Variable; *k* = Number of studies; N_{obv} = Number of effect size observations; *r* = Pearson's r meta-analytic effect size; 95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval; *SD* = Standard Deviation of Pearson's r meta-analytic effect size; *Q* = Cochrane's Q heterogeneity statistic.

the proportion of fake news post shared (for details see supplement).

7. General discussion

While it is widely known that social media is a vehicle for influence by businesses, and both political and social activists (Chen, Bai, & Wang, 2019; Greijdanus et al., 2020; Sajid, 2016), an understanding of the exercise of power on social media beyond the pursuit of business and collective goals is lacking. Here, we posited that people who desire to influence and control others and to ascend in power structures (i.e., power-motivated people) actively engage in social media and disproportionately spread information, and in particular, misinformation.

Power motives were examined as chronic dispositions within interpersonal relationships (dominance; Studies 1 to 4), as life standards within larger systems (power values; Studies 2 and 4), and context-specific desires related to social media (Studies 3 and 4). We also explored the effects of actual power in natural (Study 4) and experimental settings (and Study 3). The studies consistently found evidence for positive associations between power motives, the frequency of sharing other people's posts in daily life, the number of posts shared in the simulation of sharing information on social media task, and disproportionate dissemination of fake news.

An internal meta-analysis revealed that power values was the strongest predictor of spreading information in everyday sharing and the simulation task, in particular for fake news posts. This suggests that having trans-situational life standards associated with power (influence, authority and wealth) better predicts spreading (mis)information compared to more specific power goals related to social interactions, which is characteristic of dominant individuals. Importantly, both power values and dominance positively predicted a desire to be influential in online networks, with medium to large effect sizes. The indirect relationship between chronic power motives and the spread of (mis) information through the desire to exercise influence on social media (see supplement, p.27) provides process related insights, suggesting that chronic power motives affect lower-level power goals, which ultimately instill the spread of misinformation and facilitate control and influence over narratives on social media.

We examined the boundary conditions of the effects of power motives on social media behavior by considering various other social hierarchical variables. An experiment (Study 3) corroborated the notion that power motives (here dominance) and not the possession of actual power per se was linked to increased spreading of misinformation. This result was replicated in Study 4 in which we measured occupational power. Power shared variance with dominance and power values in predicting the number of posts shared in the simulation task and everyday life and it was not a unique predictor of sharing information when these dispositions were considered. Thus, due to self-selection processes in ecological settings, power can be associated with active social media engagement. Importantly, power per se has no effects on the spread of misinformation. More generally, variables related to the temporary or chronic experience of power, including induced power, occupational power and sense of power obtained across the studies had no relationship or a negligible relationship to the proportion of fake news shared.

The present research contributes to an emerging body of literature that investigates the unique and joint effects of power motives and actual power on behavior (e.g., Kim & Guinote, 2022). Furthermore, prestige related motives, assessed through quest for significance, were not associated with the spread of misinformation. This could occur because sharing misinformation could damage people's reputation (Altay et al., 2020) and therefore would not satisfy the needs of those who seek primarily prestige and reputation. In summary, only power motives fostered the spread of misinformation.

Sharing posts in daily life and in the simulation task were associated with an elevated sense of power over one's social network, whereby individuals influence others and control narratives on social media, although this correlation was modest. Furthermore, the notion that sharing posts satisfies the desire to influence others on social media was directly supported in Study 4. Dominance and power values were positively associated with the satisfaction of influence attained on social media, sequentially through an elevated desire to exercise influence on social media, and then with an increased number of posts shared in the simulation task (see Fig. S3). Although this evidence is correlational and the direction of the effects cannot be fully assessed, enhanced sharing of posts could contribute to elevated sense of power. This hypothesis awaits further investigation.

Power motives were also associated with generalized active use of social media. Similar behavior has been observed offline, as dominant people display increased speaking times (Mast, 2010; Reid & Ng, 1999), and assertive communication (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013). While these individuals may lack actual power, which more effectively enables influence and control, they rely on context specific soft bases of power—here, informational power (Raven, 1993)—to influence others and gain centrality in their social networks.

Even though participants generally shared more real compared to fake news posts, this difference was diminished among power motivated individuals. It is noteworthy that the association between power motives and sharing was only significant for the number of fake (but not reliable) news headlines shared. Thus, the effects may be specific to the spread of unreliable information.

Power-motivated individuals *disproportionately* shared misinformation in relation to all posts that they shared, even though they were relatively more aware of having spread misinformation in the recent past. Although this does not necessarily reflect raised awareness in the present task, awareness of past misinformation spreading should have increased accuracy concerns, and thereby diminish misinformation spreading (Pennycook et al., 2020). Together, the results suggest that power-motivated individuals may lack accuracy motivation, whereby real and fake news hold a similar standing in their sharing priorities (see Ceylan et al., 2023; Chadwick et al., 2022; Chadwick and Vaccari, 2019a; Pennycook et al., 2020). This occurs even though spreading misleading information can be considered immoral behavior (Joyner, Buchanan, & Yetkili, 2023).

Past research found that power-motivated individuals tend to morally disengage in offline contexts (e.g., Kim & Guinote, 2022). They tend to bend rules, as a way to convey power and dominance (Homan et al., 2023). Similarly, the present results can be interpreted as reflecting greater moral leniency or disengagement for the consequences of spreading misinformation. Moral disengagement in digital spaces can be associated with cyberbullying and cyber gossiping (Maftei, Holman, & Merlici, 2022). Making offensive statements in the form of spreading misinformation signals power (De Araujo et al., 2020). Thus, rather than a passive absence of accuracy motivations, it is possible that power-motivated individuals spread misinformation disproportionately to increase their visibility and network centrality, provoke others, and bend norms, all behaviors whch are related to power.

From a broader perspective, these findings are consistent with the Dominance Behavioral System (DBS; Johnson et al., 2012). The DBS promotes the flexible use of any means that aid the pursuit of social influence goals in social settings by power-motivated individuals. Misinformation may appeal due to the manipulability of narratives, wherein the spreading of information is a sort of brokerage that can help one climb the ranks. Nevertheless, future research needs to establish the causes of disproportionate spreading of misinformation among power motivated individuals.

It is noteworthy that people disproportionately spread misinformation when misinformation is consistent with their beliefs (Joyner et al., 2023) and goals, such as political goals near elections (Guo et al., 2017). As such, the present associations between power motives and (mis)information spreading may be stronger when misinformation is congruent with the individuals' beliefs or goals. This is an important question given

debates suggesting that excess misinformation has been driven by some powerful elites and political activists who desire power during elections (e.g., Guo et al., 2017; Valenzuela et al., 2019).

People with strong power motivations may seek to become opinion leaders as a way to exert control and influence over others. However, it is also important to consider that network position is not solely determined by power motivations. Other factors, such as social skills, access to resources, expertise, and personal charisma, can also contribute to an individual's influential status within a network (Chiu, Balkundi, & Weinberg, 2017; Treadway et al., 2013). These factors can indeed be confounded with power motivations. For example, individuals who are motivated by power may actively seek to expand their social networks, acquire expertise, and develop their communication skills to enhance their influence. Further research should consider these additional predictors and discuss how they may interact with power motivations in determining influential status. In addition, here we focused on a coherent set of motives related to power, including power values. Although our pre-registered hypothesis related to values focused solely on power values, future research could examine the associations between all values of the Schwartz (1992) circumplex and the spread of (mis)information.[7]

Finally, our methods combined declarations of sharing posts in daily life, and we delved into examining actual behavior using a simulation task. To examine preferences for sharing some types of information over others, we developed the simulation of sharing information in social media task. The task enables researchers to differentiate between the propensity to share reliable information, misinformation, and to discern between the two. While our focus is not on real online behavior, the simulation task allows us to control numerous variables and circumvent past limitations due to floor effects when attempting to examine the spread of misinformation (Ceylan et al., 2023). The positive associations between sharing in the simulation task and reports of sharing in everyday life supports the validity of the simulation task as a measure of social media sharing behavior. However, further research needs to explore real-world dynamics and validate our findings across different settings, for example, by analyzing people's own twitter handles. So-called "influencers" may display similar characteristics online to participants that were found in the current research presented.

To sum up, this research contributes significantly to our understanding of how-power motives influence social media behavior, particularly in the context of sharing (mis)information. Our findings suggest that individuals with strong power motives, particularly those who prioritize power as a life value, are more likely to actively engage in social media by sharing posts, including misinformation. This behavior appears to be driven by a desire to influence others and assert control within online networks, aligning with broader theories of dominance and power dynamics.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ana Guinote: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Malgorzata Kossowska:** Writing – review & editing, Funding acquisition. **Marian Jago:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Success Idenekpoma:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Mikey Biddlestone:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation.

[7] Exploratory analyses suggested that other values, such as tradition (positive relationship) and universalism (negative relationship) are also associated to the disproportionate spread of misinformation on social media. Similarly, political orientation is positively associated with disproportionate spread of misinformation on social media.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

the data link has been included in the manuscript

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2024.108453.

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