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Power and rent-seeking on boards: a case study of national sport federations in India

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ABSTRACT

Rent-seeking refers to the activities of individuals or groups who act to increase their personal benefits at the expense of organizations or wider society. Due to the inherently damaging nature of rent-seeking and its prevalence on some sport boards, there is a need for researchers to examine how it emerges and persists. The purpose of this study is to investigate how power influences the rent-seeking activities of board members in Indian national sport federations. An embedded single case study design is adopted. Drawing on a four-dimensional model of power, the research finds that board members source and use the *power of resources*, the *power of processes* and the *power of meaning* to fuel their rent-seeking activities. The findings show that these three forms of power have a mutually reinforcing effect, while the *power of the system* creates the context in which the other dimensions are used. The findings offer new insight into how board members, motivated by personal gain, ensure that suboptimal organizational governance structures are preserved in sport. This study contributes theoretically by illuminating how different dimensions of power interact in rent-seeking processes. Practical recommendations are outlined for stakeholders who want to overcome rent-seeking.

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KEYWORDS

Governance rent-seeking; board processes; power dynamics; corruption; integrity; ethics

1. Introduction

There has been a marked increase in sport governance scholarship over the past two decades (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2020). Growing academic interest in the topic has stemmed from the ongoing development of sport into a highly commercialized and geopolitically significant industry (Dowling et al., 2018). In this evolving context, researchers have emphasized the importance of examining governance in relation to protecting the integrity of sport, promoting sustainability among sport organizations and safeguarding vulnerable stakeholders such as athletes and fans (Geeraert et al., 2014). Recent high-profile sport scandals, including those involving the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the Russian Athletics Federation and USA Gymnastics, have further highlighted the need for good governance across the sector (Chappelet, 2018; McLeod, 2018).

Scholars have made considerable headway in developing understandings of sport governance. This has included studies examining principles of good governance across

countries (Parent & Hoye, 2018), governance structures (Parent et al., 2018) and board roles (McLeod, 2020; McLeod et al., 2019). A body of literature has also emerged on board behaviour and processes in sport. For instance, studies have illuminated how sport boards can improve their effectiveness by distributing power between directors (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003b), building strategic capability (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010, 2012), facilitating collaboration in governance networks (Shilbury et al., 2016) and adopting certain leadership approaches (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003a; O'Boyle et al., 2019).

Despite the progression of the literature, an important phenomenon that has so far received insufficient attention from sport governance researchers is "rent-seeking". Buchanan (1980) asserted that the "term rent-seeking is designed to describe behaviour in institutional settings where individual efforts to maximise value generate social waste rather than social surplus" (p. 4). This definition is consistent with other scholars (e.g., Bhagwati, 1982; Tullock, 1989), who used the term rent-seeking to refer to the activities of individuals or groups who act to increase their personal benefits at the expense of organizations or wider society. Rent-seeking can thus be understood as self-serving behaviour that benefits a narrow scope of stakeholders while being detrimental to broader groups. Recent research indicates that rent-seeking has been a persistent issue on some sport boards and emphasized the need for scholars to examine it to gain a more holistic understanding of global sport governance (McLeod, Shilbury et al., 2020).

There are various methods of rent-seeking including lobbying, manipulation and dominance, cartel formation and bribery (Choi & Storr, 2019). Rent-seeking is not necessarily illegal and does not necessarily involve corruption. Legitimate lobbying campaigns can be considered rent-seeking providing that they lead to a broader social cost. Corruption is one, but not the only, means of rent-seeking (Ngo, 2008). Traditionally, scholars interested in rent-seeking have primarily focused on situations where self-serving actors seek to enrich themselves by gaining access to property or competitive advantage (Cheikbossian, 2003; Gao, 2011). Rent-seeking can also occur in relation to governance structures, which refers to the rules, procedures and processes that guide governance roles and responsibilities in organizations (Kor & Misangyi, 2008). Yoshikawa and Rasheed (2009) conceptualized this form of "governance rent-seeking" to involve situations in which governance structures "persist even after they have become demonstrably sub-optimal because of the presence and actions of parties who resist change, because it would reduce their private benefits of control while the efficiency gains from change would be shared by several actors" (p. 393).

McLeod, Shilbury et al. (2020) recently identified governance rent-seeking to be a systemic issue in Indian sport and indicated that it is likely to be prevalent in other non-Western sport contexts. They found that, in countries like India, stakeholders such as commercial partners and athletes have been putting pressure on the boards of national sport federations (NSFs) to align their governance structures with international standards of good governance (e.g., with respect to term limits, transparency and accountability). Yet, rent-seeking board members appear to be resisting that pressure due to the personal benefits (such as concentrated control and no term limits) they attain from existing structures. McLeod, Shilbury et al. (2020) did not delve into how rent-seeking evolves and manifests itself, just that it existed and was a recognized issue among key stakeholders (such as athletes, journalists, sports fans and board members).

It is arguable that governance rent-seeking will be more common in sport compared to other contexts due to the unique emotional connection board members often have to a sport and sport organizations, and the sense of prestige and social status they attain by association (Zeimers & Shilbury, 2020). However, to date, there has been no research on governance rent-seeking in sport and it is unclear how it emerges and persists. This is an important gap to address given that poorly-designed governance structures (i.e., those that lack appropriate levels of diversity, transparency and stakeholder engagement) are argued to lead to poor managerial performance and offer insufficient protection to athletes (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2019; Geeraert et al., 2014; Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009). In turn, this has direct implications for Indian society, which cares passionately about having a sport system that can best facilitate athlete success and uphold high standards of integrity (McLeod & Shilbury, 2020).

When attempting to theorize how governance rent-seeking manifests in NSFs, this study argues that the concept of power is likely to be highly relevant. In management research, power is broadly understood as “a force that affects outcomes, while politics is power in action” (Hardy, 1996, p. 53). Researchers have long highlighted the key role of power in shaping organizational behaviour (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). This has included studies positioned in the sport governance context, where power has been found to be a determinant of board collaboration (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003b) and strategic activity (Amis et al., 2004; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010). Corporate governance researchers have also examined the pertinence of power to concepts related to rent-seeking, including bribery (Shaheer et al., 2019). Meanwhile, scholars examining rent-seeking directly have often referred, either implicitly or explicitly, to the salience of power (Sturzenegger & Tommasi, 1994). Collectively, these studies indicate that power is likely to be an important antecedent of governance rent-seeking (Ciabuschi et al., 2012). Indeed, it is axiomatic that actors need power to control resources to engage in such behaviour (Mudambi & Navarra, 2004). However, researchers have not yet examined the underlying mechanisms through which this occurs.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to investigate how power influences governance rent-seeking in Indian NSFs. This study uses Hardy's (1996) four-dimensional model to operationalize the concept of power. This study makes three contributions. First, it extends the sport governance literature by illuminating how power influences a previously unexplored type of board behaviour, rent-seeking. Second, it contributes theoretically by extending Hardy's (1996) model of power and reaffirming its explanatory value. Finally, this study makes an important contribution to practice by enhancing understandings of how power influences rent-seeking and by outlining recommendations sport stakeholders could adopt to overcome it. Whilst acknowledging the specificity of the Indian sport context, the lessons learnt from this research are expected to be useful to practitioners grappling with rent-seeking in other sectors.

2. Rent-seeking in Indian sport

In India, the commercialization and professionalization of sport has been slower than in other, particularly Western, countries. Nevertheless, in recent years, the Indian sport sector has shown potential for strong growth. The introduction of new professional leagues funded by international corporations (in a range of sports including cricket and soccer) has been a key factor in its development (Mitra, 2010). In this dynamic environment,

however, there has been greater attention on governance and the substandard practices of many NSFs have been exposed (McLeod & Shilbury, 2020)

A high-profile example of poor governance practices is the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), which has long been reported to have problems with nepotism, conflict of interest, a lack of transparency and corruption (Lakshman & Akhter, 2013). Due to the cultural significance of cricket in India, the country's Supreme Court deemed it necessary in 2015 to enforce, by judicial order, governance reform on the BCCI. In ongoing court proceedings, the BCCI's leaders have vehemently resisted this intervention, which requires them to become accountable for their actions, operate transparently and engage with key stakeholders (McLeod & Star, 2020).

Research indicates that adopting good governance principles – namely transparency, accountability, democratic processes and societal responsibility – offers important protections to NSFs and is likely to improve their efficiency (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2019; Geeraert et al., 2014). Thus, it is reasonable to assert that the resistance of BCCI decision-makers to adopt these principles into their structures has had a negative organizational and social cost in India. That is, the Indian sport sector is not benefitting from governance structures that promote integrity and efficiency, and eventually successful sport performance at the elite and grassroots levels (McLeod, Shilbury et al., 2020). As such, this paper argues that their behaviour fits within the definition of rent-seeking.

The BCCI represents just one example in what appears to be systemic levels of rent-seeking in Indian sport. In recent years, the governing bodies for boxing, archery, volleyball, tennis, football, shooting and wrestling have all been subject to public interest litigation in which they have resisted efforts to adopt internationally established good governance principles (Bhatia, 2019). Commentators widely assert that the motivation for NSF leaders to resist governance reform is clear – it would entail structural change that would compromise the personal level of influence they hold over their organizations (Hussain, 2019). This is indicative of what has been described as the “dynasty rule” of Indian NSFs – meaning individuals or families have seized control of the organizations and resisted attempts from other stakeholders to participate in decision-making (Dhyani, 2019). An example of this is the BCCI who, prior to the Supreme Court's intervention, thwarted continuous attempts from cricketers to form a players' union. Notably, the Archery Association of India has recently been criticized for having the same President for 44 years and resisting governance reform.

Corroborating the proposition that rent-seeking is prevalent in Indian sport are a range of stakeholders (including journalists, sport activists, athletes, sport lawyers and sport management scholars) who have consistently criticized the leaders of NSFs for their apparent self-interest and failure to put systems and structures in place that will facilitate long-term success (Dorsey, 2015; Schoenberg, 2019). Athletes, sport fans and Indian society ultimately appear to have lost out – a common mantra used is that Indian athletes “succeed despite the system, not because of it” (McLeod & Shilbury, 2020, p. 28).

Further evidence of rent-seeking in Indian sport has arguably been visible in the resistance to the introduction of a governance code for the sector. In 2017, India's Sports Ministry formed an expert panel to draft the National Code for Good Governance in Sports. Among a range of requirements, the new code intended to strengthen rules around transparency and accountability and impose tighter age and tenure limits. Importantly, the new code would also limit the level of political influence in Indian NSFs

(Hussain, 2019). This is significant because it is commonplace for politicians to be office-bearers in Indian NSFs. A recent report showed that 47% of Olympic NSFs had a politician as their President, which is an unprecedented level of political involvement in sport for a democratic country (Team Bridge, 2018). It has been argued that the prevalence of politicians in Indian sport has created an unfair environment where some NSFs disproportionately benefit from government funding and access to sporting infrastructure. This is not a new phenomenon in India. In 2012, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) suspended the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) for contravening its rules on government interference in sport. That ban was eventually revoked in 2014 when the IOA altered its election protocols (Bhatia, 2019). Excessive political influence in Indian sport has also been argued to come at the expense of corporate involvement, which is an important driver of professionalization and athlete success (Kamath, 2016).

At the time of writing, the draft governance code has not been introduced due to widely reported resistance from political actors who hold positions in NSFs. As Bhatia (2019) noted, it is not in their interests to support the introduction of the code because they would lose the personal benefits, such as status and prestige, they currently receive from their involvement in sport. This research proposes that the resistance of board members to the code's introduction is indicative of rent-seeking behaviour. Rent-seeking has taken a number of forms in Indian sport, from corruption and bribery, to governmental lobbying and abuse via dominating electoral processes (Kamath, 2016). The apparent prevalence of rent-seeking in Indian sport in particular makes it an ideal setting in which to pursue the research aim. It should be noted, though, that India is not the only country susceptible to rent-seeking in sport governance. Such behaviour is reportedly common across Asian nations (Dorsey, 2015), while international federations such as FIFA have been criticized for behaving as "political cartels" that protect the interests of a small block of countries ahead of the interests of world football (Menary, 2019). The insights gained from this study on how power is used to fuel rent-seeking in Indian sport are thus expected to be applicable to these wider contexts.

3. Theoretical background

The concept of power has received considerable attention from organizational researchers. As noted in the introduction, at a basic level, power is understood as "a force that affects outcomes, while politics is power in action" (Hardy, 1996, p. S3). Beyond this basic understanding, however, there is a wide range of perspectives on the characteristics, sources and utility of power. Broadly, these perspectives fall into three main categories: "mainstream", "critical" and "Foucauldian" (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998). The mainstream perspective is rooted in the work of early theorists who conceptualized power narrowly as a resource that actors use in decision-making forums to defeat conflict or disagreement (Dahl, 1957; Pettigrew, 1973; Weber, 1947). Traditionally, mainstream theorists considered power to derive from control over resources on which others depend (e. g., money and information) (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974) or from positional authority and individual characteristics (French & Raven, 1960). However, mainstream scholars note that individuals can also source power through the exploitation of procedures and political routines, which allows them to prevent disagreeing parties from participating in decision-making (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962, 1963).

The critical perspective differs from the mainstream perspective by viewing power not as a resource used to defeat conflict, but as a means of preventing conflict from occurring in the first place (Clegg, 1989; Fox, 1973). Lukes (1974) theorized that power can be used to “shape people’s perceptions cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things” (p. 24). Thus, people are “duped, hood-winked, coerced, cajoled, or manipulated into political inactivity” (Saunders, 1980, p. 20). This perspective aligns with critical theory (Deetz, 1992), which proposes that dominant actors, through the production of everyday beliefs and practices, use power to facilitate a general acceptance of the legitimacy of existing societal structures (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). In management settings, the critical perspective views power as a way of managing communications and meaning to condition organizational actors into agreeing that structures and practices are appropriate (Pettigrew, 1979).

The Foucauldian perspective has evolved from a series of works from Michel Foucault that conceptualize power in deep structural terms as a web of relations and discourses that manifest in every perception, judgement and act (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1982). Foucault does not see individuals as autonomous actors, but as subjects intrinsically constrained by the power of the systems in which they exist. The Foucauldian perspective differs from the critical perspective in how it views resistance to power. While critical theorists see education and reflection as a means to escape regimes of power (Deetz, 1992), the Foucauldian perspective argues that “power is embedded in the very fabric of the system, it constrains how we see, what we see, and how we think, in ways that limit our capacity for resistance” (Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998, p. 460).

Hardy (1996) proposed that the different perspectives of power are not mutually exclusive, but rather they illustrate how power works at different levels. On the surface, actors use power by either mobilizing resources or controlling decision-making processes to defeat conflict (mainstream perspective). At a deeper level, actors use power to manage meaning and control the perceptions of others (critical perspective). Deeper still, the power embedded within systems constrains the ability of any individual to act with agency (Foucauldian perspective) (Hardy & Leiba-O’Sullivan, 1998). To develop insight into how power influences organizations, Hardy (1996) developed a model that integrated the three perspectives. Hardy’s model is an extension of Lukes (1974) three-dimensional model of power that draws on the mainstream and critical perspectives. Hardy developed the model by adding a fourth dimension that integrated the Foucauldian perspective. The four-dimensional model theorizes the multi-faceted ways in which power works and is used in organizations (see Table 1).

Hardy’s (1996) model offers a useful framework to guide this study. The model was originally developed to assess how power influences strategic change. A number of subsequent studies have highlighted the explanatory value of Hardy’s framework for explaining different types of change in various contexts. This has included studies examining how power is used to facilitate the introduction of new information systems (Dhillon, 2004), human resource management initiatives (Sheehan et al., 2014) and knowledge integration in supply chains (Matheus et al., 2017). As Medema (1991) noted, rent-seeking ultimately involves actors trying to facilitate or resist change to the status quo (through processes such as lobbying or bribery) to suit their personal interests. The demonstrated effectiveness of Hardy’s model at explaining how power influences change processes therefore makes it an ideal fit for this research.

Table 1. The four dimensions of power.

Dimension	Explanation	Perspective	Key authors
Power of resources	This dimension of power manifests as actors using their access to, or control over, key resources to influence the behaviour of others. Resource power may be structural, relational or individual. Examples of resource power include position authority; access to higher echelon actors; the control of money, rewards, sanctions and information; and personal traits.	Mainstream	Dahl (1957); Pettigrew (1973); Pfeffer and Salancik (1974)
Power of processes	This dimension of power resides in the organizational decision-making processes. Process power is sometimes labelled “non-decision-making” because involves actors exploiting procedures and political routines to prevent others from participating in decision-making. Non-decision-making is as a device through which dominant groups can protect the status quo by mobilizing the biases that are embedded in existing decision-making processes.	Mainstream	Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1963)
Power of meaning	This dimension of power refers to the capacity to legitimize interests through the management of meaning, using symbols, rituals and language to make initiatives appear legitimate, desirable, rational and inevitable.	Critical	Fox (1973); Lukes (1974)
Power of the system	This dimension of power is embedded deep within the organizational system that everyone takes for granted and it lies in the unconscious acceptance of the values, traditions, cultures and structures of a given institution. System power represents the backdrop against which all organizational actions take place.	Foucauldian	Foucault (1977, 1980, 1982)

Formulated from Hardy and Leiba-O’Sullivan (1998)

Hardy argued that because the fourth dimension of power lies in the unconscious acceptance of culture and norms, it is typically beyond the reach of individual actors to use or manipulate. Instead, Hardy asserts that whether or not actors are successful in using power to achieve an objective will depend on their ability to mobilize and manage the power of resources, processes and meaning. Thus, this study involves examining how board members in Indian NSFs use those three forms of power to sustain their rent-seeking activities, whilst also investigating the broader role of system power in this process. Researchers have noted that the four dimensions of power are likely to be interrelated (Dhillon et al., 2011; Hardy, 1996). To date, however, empirical research has offered little insight into the ways in which they might be interrelated, or the effects of interrelatedness. This research will pay particular attention to this issue in an effort to theoretically extend the model.

4. Methods

This study adopted a single embedded case study design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2002). Qualitative methods were employed (interviews, focus group and secondary sources). The case study was explanatory in purpose and, following the approach of previous studies (e.g., Dowling & Washington, 2017) started with a defined research aim and theoretical framework. Case study research involves the investigation of phenomena within a bounded context (Stake, 1995). An individual person, organization, process, event or entire industry can all be considered a “case”, providing that the boundaries of the case

are clearly established (Merriam, 1998). The case and main unit of analysis in this research is the NSFs in India as a collective. The individual NSFs represent the embedded units of analysis.

Consistent with the aim of this study, qualitative case studies are effective when the objective is to gain rich insights into social phenomena (Stake, 1995). A key characteristic of case studies is that they take into account contextual circumstances and, as Yin (2002) noted, case studies are especially appropriate when “the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). This mirrors the present research, where it is expected that the context of India will influence the way in which power and rent-seeking manifest in NSFs. Thus, adopting the case study approach allows contextual idiosyncrasies of India to be incorporated into the analysis (Merriam, 1998). The rationale for implementing a single, as opposed to a multiple, case study design relates to the “revelatory” (Yin, 2002) nature of studying rent-seeking in Indian NSFs. The focused nature of the single case study allows the researcher to gain a deep view of the phenomenon.

4.1. *Sampling*

In accordance with the single case study design, a purposive sampling approach was implemented (Merriam, 1998). Purposive sampling is a technique in which researchers choose their study’s participants based on their ability to provide insight into the research aim (Etikan, 2016). At a broad level, this involved choosing Indian NSFs as the setting to conduct the research. This decision reflected Seawright’s (2016) advice to choose “extreme” cases in which the phenomena of interest are particularly prevalent. Such cases are considered to be beneficial because they reveal more information about underlying social mechanisms (Pettigrew, 1990).

There are approximately 62 NSFs in India (Chelladurai et al., 2013). In the absence of relevant published articles, the lead researcher reviewed the websites and constitutions of 10 Indian NSFs to gain a general understanding of their structure and processes. A diverse range of 10 NSFs (in terms of their finances, professionalization and popularity in India) were chosen for this process to ensure that the research accounted for different organizational forms. Ten NSFs that fit these criteria were selected from the list of NSFs provided on the Sport Authority of India’s website. Ten was considered an appropriate number of NSFs to review for background purposes in light of the number of NSFs in India and the time constraints on the project. The review showed that the structure of NSFs in India appears to have two main layers: the general body and the executive board (sometimes labelled the executive committee). The general body is composed of member associations who, together, ultimately control the sport. The members predominantly state sport associations. Given that India has 29 states and 7 union territories, NSFs can have circa 36 members (although it is often less). Constitutional documents showed that general bodies meet once per year and focus predominantly on elections and voting on constitutional changes. General body members elect a President and other office-bearers (e.g., Vice Presidents and General Secretary) to lead the NSF with the support of an executive board. Review of NSF websites indicated that executive boards appear to range in size from 13 to 25. The boards are composed of representatives of state associations plus the office-bearers. The constitutions showed that executive boards tend to meet 2-6 times per year

and that it is their responsibility to oversee the strategic, regulatory and operational functions of the NSF.

To gain a thorough understanding of how power influences rent-seeking in Indian NSFs, it was necessary to gain the insight of a wide array of stakeholders (Stake, 1995). The individuals closest to the rent-seeking behaviour under investigation are the NSF executive board members. Understanding their views is thus imperative to the research aim. However, given their closeness and perhaps involvement in rent-seeking, relying solely on their perspectives for interview data would be problematic. Gaining the insight of independent participants (i.e., people who have never held positions in or are directly associated with NSFs), who were also highly informed about governance in Indian NSFs, was therefore considered crucial to ensure reliability in the findings (Merriam, 1998). This research thus follows previous studies that have examined integrity issues in sport by acknowledging the need to consult both internal and external sources (Verschuuren, 2020). The sampling approach and selection criteria involved recruiting a diverse and balanced range of participants who could provide detailed insight into how power influences rent-seeking in Indian sport. This included NSF board members, politicians, sport activists, sport lawyers, sport business consultants, representatives of relevant governmental bodies, representatives of athletes' unions and professional sport representatives (all of whom worked in the Indian context) The researchers relied on social media profiles, traditional media and word-of-mouth to judge whether these participants could provide an informed perspective on rent-seeking in Indian NSFs.

Due to the researchers' relative unfamiliarity with the Indian sport sector and the sensitivity of the topic, participant recruitment was challenging and required extensive work. A snowball sampling approach (Handcock & Gile, 2011) was planned but proved ineffective. There was often an implicit or explicit sense that many interviewees did not want to compromise their confidentiality by introducing the researchers to other potential interviewees. As such, the most useful recruitment method was for the researchers to contact prospective interviewees directly using information listed on their organizations' websites. The lead researcher contacted board members from all NSFs where contact information was available. This equated to over 140 interview requests to individuals associated with 28 different NSFs.

The sample size was guided by the principle of theoretical saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989). In total, 38 individuals were interviewed and 12 individuals participated in a focus group. Of the individual interviews, 23 were NSF board members while 15 were representatives of independent organizations. There were 12 different NSFs represented in the sample, some of which varied greatly in terms of their size. The 15 "independent" interviewees came from 13 different organizations. These individuals were also recruited via contact details available on their organizations' websites. Three of the 38 interview participants were women (one NSF board member and two independents), which reflects the considerable lack of gender diversity in Indian NSFs (McLeod, Shilbury et al., 2020). The vast majority of participants were located in either Delhi, Mumbai or Bangalore. All of the focus group participants, one of which was a woman, had extensive experience in Indian sport and were from a diverse range of backgrounds (including NSF office-bearers, sport journalists, sport business consultants, NSF commercial partners and sport charities). Two focus group participants also took part in individual interviews. As is common in India, all participants spoke excellent English. For reasons of confidentiality, the

organizations and individuals who participated in this research are not named. In the findings, interviewees from independent organizations are coded as I-1, I-2 and so on. Interviewees from NSFs are coded as NSF-1, NSF-2 and so on. Focus group participants are coded FG-1, FG-2 and so on.

4.2. Data collection

Data collection for case studies should be multi-faceted to achieve triangulation, which serves to enhance the validity of the findings (Yin, 2002). Three forms of data were collected – 38 semi-structured interviews, 1 focus group and various secondary materials (this included the constitutions of NSFs from which board members were interviewed; newspaper interviews with key stakeholders; videos of conference presentations and debates involving industry experts; consultant and policy reports; websites of key organizations; NSF general meeting minutes). Interviews and focus groups are appropriate methods for investigating complex behaviour (Berg, 1998). Given the sensitive nature of the research, conducting one-to-one interviews was imperative so that participants had confidence to share their insights freely and in detail (McLeod, Adams et al., 2020). The rationale for the focus group (Liamputtong, 2011) was that it would facilitate a synergistic discussion that would potentially provoke insights beyond what the researcher could elicit in an interview setting. Secondary sources are widely regarded to be useful to test and corroborate primary findings (Patton, 2002).

The lead researcher was responsible for the primary data collection, which was carried out on three two-week trips to India in 2019–2020. The procedure for the interviews involved, firstly, explaining the scope and purpose of the research. The definition of key terms, such as rent-seeking were clarified at the outset. Ethical considerations surrounding participation were then discussed and confidentiality was offered. With the participants' consent, the researcher then began to work through the interview guide, which was developed in line with the theoretical framework. A key question posed to all interviewees was "How have NSF board members managed to sustain their rent-seeking activities?" Their responses often led to implicit discussions about the sources and uses of power, and the researcher probed in this area when necessary. The majority of participants (32) agreed to the interviews being audio recorded, although six did not (in those cases detailed notes were taken). Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Interviews lasted 52 minutes on average and were predominantly undertaken face-to-face (7 had to be conducted via teleconferencing due to scheduling constraints).

There was an intention to conduct four focus groups but scheduling constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic meant it was only possible to conduct one. In line with previous research, 12 people was considered an appropriate size for the focus group (Liamputtong, 2011). The focus group was designed with a moderate degree of structure to ensure that the discussion remained centred on core issues whilst also allowing participants to expand in areas when they considered it to be useful. The focus group lasted 1 h 45 min and was audio-recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent.

4.3 Data analysis

The interview and focus group transcripts were analysed in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006) procedure for thematic analysis. This method was considered appropriate as it allows researchers to adopt a theory-driven analytical approach. There were six stages to the analysis: (a) familiarization with the data through reading and rereading the transcripts; (b) initial coding; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes to create a thematic map of the analysis; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) producing the report. Hardy's (1996) four dimensions of power constituted the *a priori* themes. The four dimensions proved to be highly effective theme categories for the data. One key inductive theme emerged, related to the interaction between the different dimensions. NVivo software was used to assist with the analysis. As per the guidance of previous research (Nicholson & Kiel, 2007; Patton, 2002), secondary sources were not put through a formal thematic analysis. Instead, the researchers used those sources at the beginning of the project to help the researchers become familiar with the topic and context and used them during the analysis to verify and triangulate the primary data. All members of the research team were involved in re-checking the coding structure to enhance the reliability of the findings (Yin, 2002).

5. Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how power influences the rent-seeking of board members in Indian NSFs. All of the independent interviewees, and the majority of the NSF representatives, were of the view that rent-seeking has been, and continues to be, a significant problem in a large number of Indian NSFs. There was a broad level of consensus that, although there are certainly exceptions, rent-seeking has been a systemic problem in Indian sport. As an independent interviewed noted: "It [rent-seeking] has been a feature of all Indian sports at some point, but the problem is very bad in the federations" (I-4).

The analysis confirmed that rent-seeking has been most visible in terms of the resistance to new governance rules such as those relating to term limits and cooling-off periods (mandated periods in between elected terms), transparency and accountability. Such resistance has manifested within individual NSFs (i.e., relating to discussions of constitutional change), and more broadly in terms of resistance to the introduction of a governance code for the whole sector. The data indicate a widely held view that resistance is motivated by a desire to maintain the *status quo*, which many NSF leaders are thought to benefit from in terms of being able to stay in their roles or by being able to operate without restrictions or oversight. Comments from a NSF board member from a business background illustrate this:

So, there have been many cases like with the BCCI where the administration just do not want to bring the sport into the 21st century ... The niceties of being there, they do not like losing that ... I do not want to say we are perfect but we do have governance ... I think we have made changes to the constitution every year since 2010 when I joined the board. (NSF-16)

The comments depicted above were somewhat common among NSF board members. These participants confirmed that rent-seeking is a significant problem in Indian sport, but they were keen to convey that it was having a minimal effect on their own organization. As one NSF board member asserted: "I am happy to say we do not have those troubles ... we are lucky"

(NSF-14). Although such sentiments may well have been genuine, it is also likely that some may have been downplaying the extent to which rent-seeking exists in their own federation. After all, there was wide agreement that it is a systemic issue. This would likely reflect a reluctance of participants to criticize organizations to which they are connected.

A minority of six participants claimed that rent-seeking is generally not a problem in Indian NSFs. As one board member put it: “I think talk of that [rent-seeking] is overblown” (NSF-9). These individuals argued that the resistance to the adoption of good governance practices in Indian sport can instead be explained by people “expecting things to happen too quickly” (NSF-12) or a genuine belief that the federation works more efficiently with existing structures.

Nevertheless, looking at the data as a whole, there was a consensus that rent-seeking is a significant problem in Indian NSFs. Participants described rent-seeking to manifest in several ways. This included lobbying, dominance over decision-making forums and, in some cases, corruption. As expected, the data revealed that the use of power is central to how board members can initiate and sustain their rent-seeking behaviour. Further, the data show that Hardy’s (1996) four-dimensional model of power is a highly effective lens through which to understand how these social mechanisms unfold. To illustrate, the following sub-sections discuss each dimension in turn. The interaction between dimensions is then analysed.

5.1. Power of resources

Resource power involves actors using their access to, or control over, key resources to influence the behaviour of others (Hardy, 1996). The data indicate that this dimension of power is a key antecedent of rent-seeking in Indian NSFs. Three different sources of resource power appeared to be salient – positional authority, access to funding and facilities, and individual characteristics.

Regarding positional authority, it was inferred from the data that individuals holding titles such as President, Vice President and General Secretary have often operationalized the power embedded in those positions to resist internal and external governance reforms. This has occurred in direct ways such as voting against or blocking initiatives brought to executive boards that seek to implement international standards of good governance. Recent governance reports have confirmed such activity (Bhatia, 2019; Schoenberg, 2019). However, the primary data suggest that it has also occurred in a way that is less visible. It was inferred that one reason why many NSF board members are unlikely to support governance reform is that they do not want to oppose individuals in higher positions. Underlying this issue appears to be a sense of discomfort with challenging authority on Indian sport boards. As an independent interviewee noted, “A big problem has been the unwillingness of people to step in and stand up to these people at the top of the federations. It is a real frustration” (I-2).

This issue was discussed extensively during the focus group. A key point to emerge was that respect for authority is a prominent element of Indian culture, and acquiescence to high-ranking individuals regarding governance structures is arguably a consequence of that culture: “It is not a natural custom here [to challenge Presidents]” (FG-3). Thus, by virtue of holding positions such as President in Indian NSFs, individuals have the power to repress dissent to their own rent-seeking. This finding emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in shaping rent-seeking. Although it was not mentioned explicitly by

the participants, India's caste system of social stratification (Chelladurai et al., 2013) may be a contributing factor to the reluctance of individuals to challenge authority.

A recurring theme across the interviews was that certain individuals have gained significant power in NSFs due to their ability to provide access to funding and facilities. This has usually been politicians, who facilitate access to state funding and sporting infrastructure. It was frequently mentioned by participants that many of these individuals have been engaged in governance rent-seeking. Specifically, it was suggested that these individuals are lobbying other board members and external regulators (i.e., the Sports Ministry) to block governance reforms (either to the constitutions of individual NSFs or the broader governance code). The analysis shows that a key reason they have been effective in their efforts is that they have been able to emphasize to their board colleagues, either implicitly or explicitly, that they may cease to provide the organization with access to those resources if governance reforms are introduced. This quote from an independent illustrated this:

Most infrastructure is government infrastructure. So almost all cricket pitches or cricket stadiums, almost all football stadiums and indoor arenas. If I want to do any major events, I cannot avoid the government. If I want to run a successful league, I need them onside ... So, these guys [politicians] have a lot of power and they just run things the way they want. There is no one there to stop them. (I-5)

Finally, some participants seemed to share a perception that individual characteristics are a source of power for NSF board members. In particular, possessing assertive and domineering personality traits were argued to generate power for these individuals, which could then be used to aid their rent-seeking behaviour. One participant implied this in the following words "If you look at [NSF board member], he has a big personality. People do not like to get on the wrong side of him. Very kind of forceful and assertive and that has helped him because it gives him influence" (NSF-11).

5.2. Power of processes

Process power resides in decision-making processes. Individuals or groups that control decision-making can access and use this power (Hardy, 1996). This dimension appeared to be another pivotal antecedent of rent-seeking activities in Indian sport, both within individual NSFs and in relation to the governance code that would reach across all NSFs in India. There was widespread acceptance among the research participants that individuals and groups have used their control over NSF general bodies and executive boards for the purposes of rent-seeking. Analysis of the interviews and focus group uncovered the *modus operandi* through which this occurs. It starts with NSF office-bearers seeking to create allies on the executive board. According to a number of independent interviewees, this is often achieved by promising financial support to state-level sport associations that other NSF board members represent. In turn, these individuals are likely to support NSF office-bearers in resisting internal or external calls for governance reform. A focus group participant explained this as follows:

I will tell you how it happens. It's very simple. Over the years because they have been around for so long, they have brought in their own yes men to the executive committee or electoral college. So, it is a give and take relationship. They keep giving largesse to these people who vote them in every four years and follow any order. (FG-6)

The data further revealed that, in a number of NSFs, individuals have often managed to maintain process power despite being forced to step down due to term limit rules. A number of interviewees provided examples of where NSF leaders have their immediate family stand for election once they have reached tenure term limit. Given that the remaining board members are likely to be their allies, there was a perception that the election of the family member was inevitable. It was suggested that the original office-bearer would typically continue to exert control through his or her family member. A NSF board member who had recently been involved in an election dispute with other factions of the federation made the following comments on this issue:

the President, when he finally goes, after 20 years or whatever time he has spent, the person that comes in should not be his protégé or any relative of his, voted in by his friends. We are still fighting this battle in many sports (NSF-4)

The analysis highlighted that the use of process power appears to have been the primary inhibitor to the introduction of the new governance code. As was discussed earlier in the paper, the code is designed in accordance with international standards of good sport governance (Geeraert et al., 2014). However, for this code to come into effect it needs political approval. Corroborating recent reports on this issue (e.g., Bhatia, 2019), a common theme in the data was that there is little motivation among politicians to make this happen because it would jeopardize their personal level of influence in NSFs. As one participant noted that there is “very little political will to get that done [implementation of governance code]. Right? Why would you make yourself ineligible or make it more difficult for yourself to capture these positions or run it the way you would like?” (I-1).

Adopting Hardy's (1996) model as an analytical lens, this appears to be a distinct example of board members using process power to maintain suboptimal structure governance structures for their personal benefit. Specifically, the decision-making forum, in this case, the administrative process for implementing a governance code, is controlled (by default) by the individuals (i.e., politicians who hold positions in NSFs) who will lose personal benefits from governance reforms in Indian sport. An independent participant summed up this issue by stating, “It is like asking the police to police themselves!” (I-12). This situation has been described as the “regulatory capture” of Indian sports by politicians (McLeod & Star, 2020).

5.3. Power of meaning

Meaning power refers to the capacity to legitimize initiatives or interests through the management of language, messaging, rituals and symbols (Sheehan et al., 2014). Hardy (1996) argued that the use of meaning power is more subtle and intangible than the resource and process dimensions. In the interviews and focus group, participants rarely highlighted concepts or ideas related to meaning power explicitly. Nonetheless, following analysis of multiple data sources, it was inferred that meaning power has played a role in supporting rent-seeking behaviour.

The data suggest that a number of NSF leaders have attempted to source and use meaning power by promoting certain mantras to Indian sport stakeholders, with the aim of influencing their perceptions. An example of this involves messaging related to the draft governance code's rules on term limits, which proposed a maximum of three four-year terms (12 years in

total), with a cooling-off period to be served after two successive terms. A phrase heard in interviews with three NSF board members concerning those proposals was that “it is not enough time”. This language and message have been repeated in leading media outlets (e.g., Sharma, 2018; The Economic Times, 2019), and seems to be indicative of an attempt from NSF leaders to generate and use meaning power to influence narratives and, ultimately, resist governance reform. On reflection, what appeared to be lost from this debate in Indian sport was that a possible three terms of four years is a comparatively long tenure limit by international standards (Geeraert et al., 2014).

Another example of a mantra that appears to be used widely in Indian sport is that “you cannot get anything done without politicians!” A number of NSF board members repeated this mantra in interviews and during the focus group – usually when the requirement of the draft governance code to limit political influence and bring greater scrutiny to NSFs was discussed. An independent participant interviewed later in the research process confirmed that this is a commonly used mantra: “Ha! Yes, you hear that all the time. It’s natural, they want to protect themselves” (I-12). The researchers’ interpreted this as an example of board members using meaning power to influence the perceptions of Indian sport stakeholders so that they accept the legitimacy of the *status quo*, which is characterized by politicians, and not professionals, controlling NSFs. Again, the mantra of “you cannot get anything done without politicians” seems disingenuous when sport systems in other countries generally have limited or no political involvement in NSFs, yet seems to be better governed and more successful (Geeraert et al., 2014). Given the subtle nature of meaning power, the extent to which it has been an effective resource for NSF leaders is unclear.

5.4. Power of the system

Unlike the other dimensions, system power is generally beyond the reach of individual actors to operationalize (Foucault, 1982). Instead, system power “lies in the unconscious acceptance of the values, traditions, cultures and structures of a given institution” (Hardy, 1996, S8). The analysis indicated that this dimension has been integral to the perpetuation of rent-seeking in NSFs. In particular, the culture embedded in the institutional context surrounding Indian sport appears to be highly conducive to rent-seeking behaviour. This issue was discussed explicitly in interviews with a range of NSF board members and independent participants. Many participants, whilst recognizing that India is a huge country with significant diversity, seemed to share a perception that “respecting authority” is a prominent cultural norm across the nation. It was subsequently acknowledged that this is likely to have influenced the prevalence of rent-seeking in Indian sport.

Comments from an independent participant illustrate this point, noting that “Indians are taught obedience from an early age. I do not think we are unique in that, but for sure it is a bigger part of the culture here than in other countries” (I-9). This respondent went on to observe that “there is a culture where senior people, Presidents, are maybe not challenged enough. Because people are scared ... or they are just not comfortable doing it” (I-9). This quote shows how the power of the system has created fertile ground for rent-seeking activity in Indian sport. Specifically, when NSF Presidents and other office-bearers resist governance reform, they appear to be aided in their efforts to do so because their stakeholders are, generally, socialized to accept the authority of those above them.

The data suggest that nepotism is another cultural norm entrenched in Indian sport. This feature of the system also appears to facilitate rent-seeking activities. There was a common perception among the interviewees that NSF leaders often promote their own associates, often their family members, for board positions. As many participants acknowledged, this practice is patently detrimental to NSFs and Indian sport more widely because personal connections are prioritized over competence. As one independent participant stated:

The problem is that some of these families are there for decades and the pipeline is their own kin and friends. So, it is very difficult to break in. The fight is with a total system. Something needs to be done because we need the best people leading sport. India has many professionals, the problem is they can't get in. (I-6)

5.5. *Interrelation of power dimensions*

The data show that the different dimensions of power do not operate in isolation. Rather, they were found to be highly interrelated and, subsequently, the way in which they interact appears to influence the extent to which rent-seeking occurs in Indian sport. The findings show that the power of the system creates the context in which the other dimensions operate. This illustrates, at the most basic level, how the dimensions are related. That is, the system power dimension plays a broader contextualizing role for the other dimensions. In practice, this means that the ability of governance actors to use resource, process and meaning power to sustain their rent-seeking activities is facilitated by the power of the system. This has been evidenced in the preceding sections, where prominent cultural norms (such as nepotism and respecting authority) have been shown to create an environment where individuals are better positioned to utilize positional authority (i.e., resource power) and dominate decision-making forums (i.e., process power).

Another key observation made during the analysis was that the resource, process and meaning dimensions appear to have a mutually reinforcing effect on each other. As the presence of one power dimension increases, the data reveals that this can strengthen the extent to which actors can source and use the other dimensions of power. Insights shared by two participants provided examples of how this works in practice:

He is very well liked and respected. He has worked for a long time in politics, so people know him and he has a lot of personal connections. So that makes it easier for him to say, 'I think we should do this or that' and people will be more receptive to those views. (NSF-16)

The executive committee is their own little fiefdom; they have controlled it directly or indirectly for many years ... So, they have received from this a level of status and reputation that makes them look like they are experts in [the sport] but personally I am not sure that is the reality. (I-9)

The above quotes exemplify the interconnection between the power dimensions. The first quote indicates how the possession of certain individual characteristics including a reputable character (resource power) can enhance the capacity of NSF leaders to make their initiatives appear more legitimate (meaning power). Similarly, the second quote highlights how dominance over decision-making forums (i.e., process power) can improve

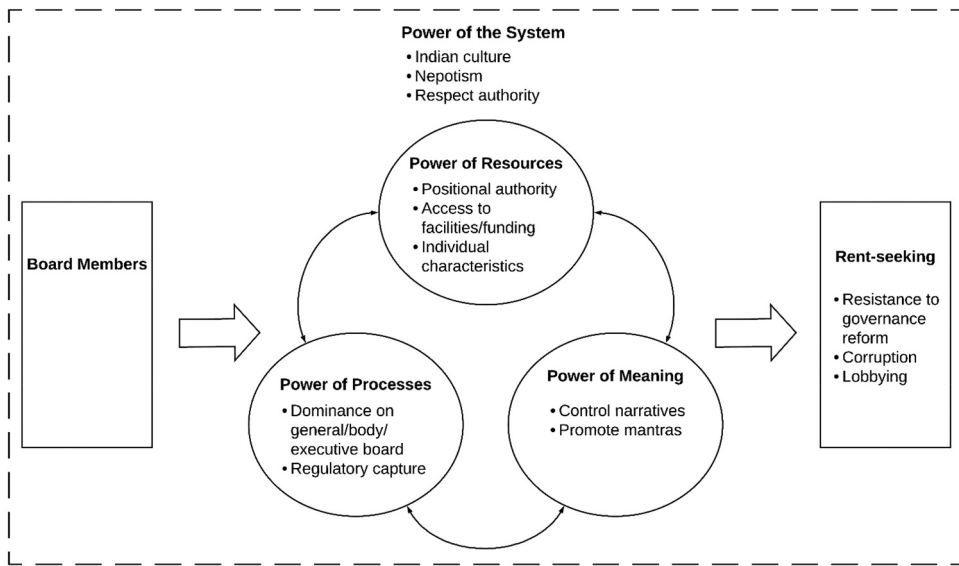


Figure 1. The influence of power on rent-seeking in Indian NSFs.

the extent to which individuals are perceived to be credible (which is a form of individual resource power). These insights illustrate the potential for power to build power and create a self-reinforcing cycle of influence that may be difficult to redress. The accumulative effects of different power dimensions may be a core reason why individuals have managed to sustain rent-seeking behaviour in Indian sport for extended periods. [Figure 1](#) presents a summary of the findings highlighting the interrelated nature of the four power dimensions on rent seeking in Indian sport governance.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study set out to examine how power influences governance rent-seeking on the boards of Indian NSFs. Hardy's (1996) model proved to be a highly effective lens through which to understand this phenomenon. The findings show that the power of the system (i.e., cultural and institutional norms) underpinning Indian sport creates a conducive environment for governance rent-seeking. In this context, board members operationalize a combination of resource, process and meaning power to fuel their rent-seeking behaviour. As [Figure 1](#) shows, the power dimensions are interrelated and appear to have a mutually reinforcing effect.

To date, there has been little acknowledgement of the problem of governance rent-seeking in sport. This study defines and raises awareness of the phenomenon, highlighting the role of power in fuelling its presence on sport boards. These insights offer a useful extension of the sport governance literature. So far, studies of board behaviour in sport have primarily focused on collaboration (Shilbury et al., 2016), leadership (O'Boyle et al., 2019) and trust building (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016). This study develops that stream of research by drawing attention to a previous unexplored and unethical type of board activity, rent-seeking. In doing so, this study has answered the calls for greater scrutiny of

maligned behaviour and integrity issues in sport governance (Kihl et al., 2017). Advancing understandings of governance rent-seeking is an important contribution given its apparent pervasiveness in contexts such as Indian sport and the inherently damaging effect it has on governance structures that are supposed to protect the interests of athletes, sports fans and, by extension, the country of India (Bhatia, 2019; Kamath, 2016).

In their recent review of the literature, Dowling et al. (2018) noted that the concept of power is central to sport governance. Yet, there has been relatively limited research on how power affects governance in sport organizations. Those studies that have examined power have predominantly done so within the context of inter-director relationships (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003b), or board–executive relationships (Amis et al., 2004). This research builds on that literature by taking a broader view of the power dynamics inherent to sport governance. Specifically, this study has investigated board members' interactions with external stakeholders, including politicians, and illustrated how these connections can be a source of power that can be used to materially influence the governance function in sport organizations. These findings strengthen the case for scholars to move beyond organizational level analyses, and consider multiple levels of analysis (e.g., systemic and political issues), when attempting to enhance understandings of good governance in sport (Dowling et al., 2018). Such analyses are particularly salient in contexts like India, where external and political influence in sport has been a persistent issue. This was highlighted when the IOC banned India in 2012 for government interference in NSFs (Bhatia, 2019).

The findings of this study offer an in-depth insight into how self-serving board members, engaging in a process of governance rent-seeking, source and use power to ensure suboptimal governance structures are preserved. Previous research has made good progress in examining the evolution of governance structures in sport (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2020). Scholars have discussed how sport organizations have been adopting increasingly professionalized structures, which involve them moving from “kitchen table” to “boardroom” and “executive office” governance arrangements (Hoye et al., 2020). Within this stream of research, the focus has primarily been on the factors that are driving this evolution (Parent et al., 2018). Traditionally, the main drivers included institutional and efficiency pressures, but recent research suggests that stakeholder involvement, a commitment to good governance and brand governance are also drivers (Hoye et al., 2020). The present study offers a new perspective to this body of literature by shifting the focus away from drivers to barriers. It is important for scholars to consider barriers such as rent-seeking because in non-Western contexts such as India they are significantly hindering the adoption of good governance principles and professional structures (McLeod, Shilbury et al., 2020). Ultimately, this is detrimental to the advancement of Indian sport (and thus, by extension, Indian society), because the sport system does not benefit from the efficiencies that those governance principles can provide (Geeraert et al., 2014). For example, there is strong evidence that the principle of transparency helps to reduce corruption in sport (Chappelet, 2018), while diversity facilitates board and organizational effectiveness (Nielsen & Huse, 2010).

This study has answered the call for scholars to examine sport governance in a wider range of cultural contexts (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; McLeod et al., 2019). The findings confirm that there is a strong case for such endeavours. Governance rent-seeking seems far more likely to occur in non-Western countries, such as India, due to cultural

and institutional norms that favour patriarchy, hierarchy and nepotism (McLeod, Shilbury et al., 2020). To gain a holistic understanding of global sport governance, including the worldwide movement towards good governance principles and structures (Geeraert, 2019), this study shows that researchers must consider cultural and contextual factors.

Hardy's (1996) four-dimensional model was found to be a useful framework for understanding how power influences rent-seeking in Indian NSFs. The framework has previously been used to examine a wide range of social phenomena including the introduction of new information systems (Dhillon, 2004), knowledge integration (Matheus et al., 2017) and human resource management initiatives (Sheehan et al., 2014). By applying the model to the concept of rent-seeking, this study has extended the reach of the model and reaffirmed its explanatory value in organizational contexts. The findings of this study resonate with Hardy and other organizational researchers who have theorized power to be a dynamic and multi-faceted concept (Finkelstein, 1992; Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998).

A limitation of previous uses of Hardy's (1996) model has been the tendency to analyse each dimension in isolation (Dhillon et al., 2011). The extent to which the dimensions are interrelated has been undertheorised. An exception to this was Matheus et al.'s (2017) research, which argued that the power of the system dimension plays a broader contextualizing role for the other dimensions. The present study's findings mirror that insight and build on it by illuminating the interrelation of the other three dimensions. Specifically, the findings suggest that these dimensions have a mutually reinforcing effect, suggesting that power builds power. The apparent mutually reinforcing nature of the power dimensions is logical. Organizational scholars have long demonstrated how actors in the possession of power have facilitated access to other kinds of resources, including influence and information (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). The present findings are in line with that insight, showing that different elements of power are interrelated and complementary. The extension of Hardy's (1996) model will assist scholars in producing more nuanced and comprehensive analyses of how power influences board behaviour in sport and beyond. This study shows that when using Hardy's model in the future, researchers should pay close attention to the interaction between different forms of power, and not merely examine their effects in isolation.

This study has important implications for practice. Firstly, the findings give Indian sport stakeholders a greater level of awareness of how certain NSF board members use different forms of power to perpetuate their rent-seeking activities. Awareness is an important step in addressing any problem. From this point, relevant stakeholders keen to eradicate such behaviour need to think strategically about how to wrestle power away from those invested in the *status quo*. There is already evidence that this power struggle is occurring in Indian sport. Athletes, prominent sport activists and special interests groups such as the GoSports Foundation have been collectively mobilizing in an effort to bring about governance reform, all the while being resisted by long-serving sport administrators and bureaucrats (Bhatia, 2019).

Hardy (1996) argued that to bring about significant change, actors must source and use resource, process and meaning power. Having access to only one dimension is usually not enough. To gain meaning power, stakeholders trying to overcome rent-seeking could develop communication strategies that promote the benefits of governance reform to powerful people, such as politicians not already involved in NSFs, who could be allies to their cause.

Social media, traditional media and industry conferences could be used to influence their perspectives. A possible strategy to gain process power is to create and strengthen athlete unions and fan organizations that can pressurize NSFs into sharing decision-making power with wider stakeholders, thus curtailing the concentrated power of politicians. Fan activism and the unionization of athletes is underdeveloped in India (as it is in many non-Western countries) (Gupta, 2018). Addressing this could be a driver of governance reform. Finally, although challenging, stakeholder groups concerned by rent-seeking in Indian sport should try to identify where they can access resource power to assist in bringing about change. Specifically, recruiting people with strong positional authority, individual characteristics and access to funding and infrastructure, and leveraging the power embedded in those resources, will be of significant help in disrupting rent-seeking actors. As previously noted, India is not the only country suffering from problems with rent-seeking in sport (Dorsey, 2015). Thus, these practical recommendations are expected to be applicable to sport managers in other contexts.

There are limitations to this research that warrant consideration. First, this study is based on the premise that rent-seeking is a systemic problem in Indian sport. However, as scholars have noted previously, defining and identifying rent-seeking is a problematic endeavour that typically involves subjective judgements about the benefit of an activity (Jaworski, 2014). Although the research has attempted to negate this limitation by presenting evidence of detrimental practices on the part of governance actors in Indian sport, rent-seeking was not measured objectively. Future research could add value by attempting to measure in more objective terms the extent of rent-seeking in Indian NSFs and the impact of such behaviour on sporting success and Indian society more widely.

A second limitation concerns the depth of insight provided into each dimension of power. The model used is multi-faceted and the findings had to cover multiple elements. The broad nature of the model has inevitably meant that the findings do not discuss each dimension in significant depth. Given the richness of the Indian sport context, it would have been possible to conduct entire studies on the sources and uses of individual dimensions of power. Scholars may pursue this avenue of research in future to gain a more detailed understanding of the influence of power dimensions on rent-seeking activities. Finally, this study involved an embedded single case study in a unique context and thus generalizability was not the aim. Future research is needed to test the extent to which the findings transfer to other settings.

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