Bridging Insights: Developing a Marketing Strategy for Bridge

A Bridge 2 Bridge project in partnership with Bridge: A MindSport for All and SHM Productions

Jordan Maclean,[1] Gary Hay,[2] Christina Ballinger,[3] Esme Nicholson,[3, 4] Maurice Biriotti,[4] and Samantha Punch[3,5]

[1]Institute for Social Marketing and Health, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK
[2]Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK
[3]Bridge2Bridge
[4]SHM Productions
[5]Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Stirling, Stirling, UK

Abstract
The image of bridge is associated with an older generation of players which might deter younger players from taking up the game. *Bridging Insights* aims to develop a marketing strategy that will promote and increase the global reach of bridge to the next generation of players. In a two-part emergent design, part 1 involved five workshops with the bridge community at the *Bridging Academia, Policy, and Practice Conference*. Poetic representations were developed based on four ideal types of bridge players: socialiser, competitor, self-improver, mind-gamer. These ideal types were then tested in part 2 which involved three focus groups with non-bridge players. There are three key findings from part 1 and 2. The first key finding was a consensus for the socialiser, self-improver, and competitor ideal types, but not for the mind-gamer type. The second key finding was that although the ideal types were evident in non-bridge players' experiences of sport, they might not be enough in themselves to persuade them to play bridge. The third key finding was that bridge was seen as a form of leisure which might undermine its credibility as a mindsport. In conclusion, we set out several recommendations based on the ideal types that were informed by the bridge community as a way for bridging the mindsport to non-bridge players.

Background and introduction

Throughout its history, the card game bridge has seen its popularity rise and fall. Despite becoming increasingly professionalised over the last three decades (Russell, Punch & McIntosh, 2022), the image of bridge is associated with an older generation of players which might deter younger players from taking up the game (Punch & Snellgrove, 2021). A key outcome of Snellgrove and Punch's (2020) report on challenges facing the European Bridge League was for an elevated profile of bridge that can attract more funding and bring more players into the mindsport. Mindsports are just one of the many types of sport that are defined as "institutionally structured games requiring mind skills" (Kobiela, 2018, p. 291).

Bridging Insights is a collaborative project between Bridge to Bridge (B2B), Bridge: A Mindsport for All (BAMSA), and SHM Productions (SHM). B2B was established in 2020 with a core aim to deliver an action plan which would see bridge promoted to its widest possible audience. BAMSA, founded in 2019 and based in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Stirling is an academic research project with practical outcomes (see www.bridgemindsport.org). Working in collaboration with bridge organisations, BAMSA has three key goals: to enhance the image of bridge, widen participation among players of all ages, and ensure that bridge continues to flourish. SHM, incorporated in 1996, is a specialist provider of business services working in the public and private sectors whose evidence-based work examines human behaviours and motivation.

Members of the marketing and research team (SP, EN, CB, MB) developed a behaviour change framework around four ideal types of bridge players - self-improver, competitor, socialiser, and mind-gamer (see Figure 1) - based on their experience of playing and being involved in the bridge community (Nicholson et al., 2021). Inspiration is taken from Durkheimian 'ideal types', which is evident in the sport studies literature (e.g., Guillanotti, 2002). The competitor type (SP) is *for the art* of the game, which is a serious yet extrinsic endeavour. SP play's bridge as an escape from work. She loves the thrill of winning and the desire to win keeps her sharp and focused when at the bridge table. The pain of losing motivates her to improve and do better next time. SP doesn't like playing if there is nothing at stake. She loves the adrenaline you get when you take a calculated risk, and it pays off. There's lots of opportunities to do well at bridge, in the bidding, play or defence, and there are competitions for all

levels. The socialiser type (EN) participates *for the fun* of the game that is extrinsically social between other people. EN is interested in motivation and what makes people tick. But when she's not at work, all she wants is to have fun. EN doesn't want structure, she doesn't want competition, she really doesn't want to be judged against anyone else. So, you can always find EN, with a glass of wine and some friends and a pack of cards, just having a bit of fun, and that's really why she play's bridge. The self-improver type (CB) plays bridge *for the challenge* of the mind game which is both serious and internally driven. CB likes nothing better than a good challenge. One of her earliest memories was when she must have been about seven years old, running laps around the house where she lived with her family in Kent and her dad was timing her. You see, it wasn't enough just to run. Part of the fun was setting targets and measuring progress. And really nothing much has changed since then! CB really enjoys pushing herself to the next level. She loves outperforming her previous best. And that's why she plays bridge. The mind-gamer type (MB) is *for the insights* of others for their own internal gain. MB spends all his time, whether working or not, just being fascinated by people. Years ago, when he was very young, he played bridge a little, and what he loved about it was, he didn't end up looking at the cards at all, he just watched the people. MB just got so fascinated by the way everyone approached bidding, the way everyone approached playing, the rhythm with which people played the game. As far as he's concerned, bridge is just another way of understanding human beings.

As presented in Figure 1, social/serious and internal/external are juxtaposed, but they do appear to be dependent on each other for different reasons. The competitive game of serious bridge is a social endeavour, while social bridge is a necessary starting point before progressing to serious bridge (Scott and Godbey, 1992). The behaviour change framework will be the basis for *bridging insights* between the bridge playing and non-bridge playing communities. Thus, the aim of this study is to develop a marketing strategy that will promote and increase the global reach of bridge to the next generation of players. The objective is to set out recommendations to inform an effective marketing campaign that will seek to promote non-players to take up bridge.
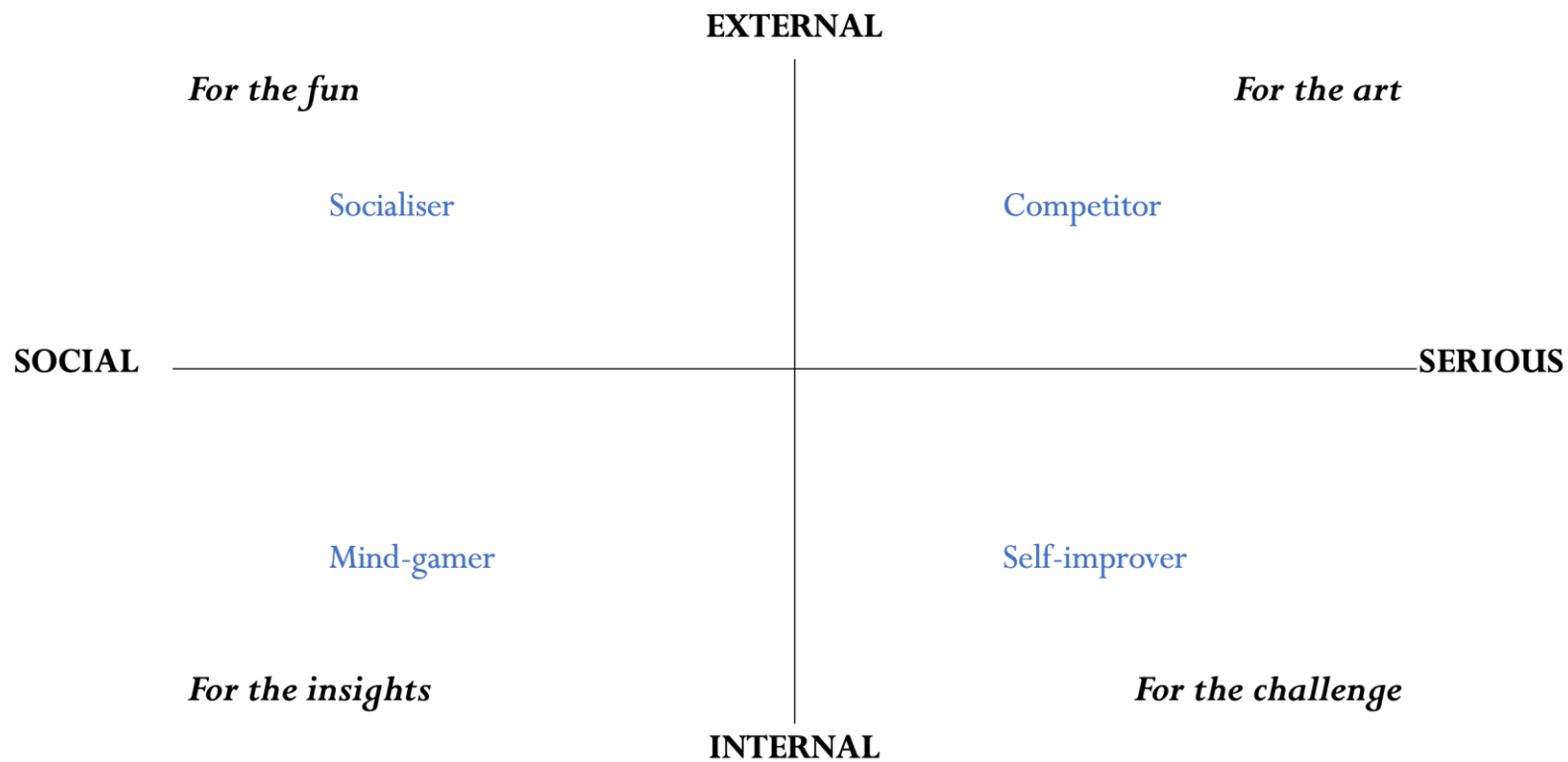
EXTERNAL

For the fun   *For the art*

Socialiser   Competitor

SOCIAL ──SERIOUS

Mind-gamer   Self-improver

For the insights   *For the challenge*

INTERNAL

Figure 1. A quadrant of ideal types of bridge players – socialiser, competitor, self-improver, mind-gamer

Methods

Context

Bridging Insights has a two-part emergent research design. Part 1 focuses on developing a marketing strategy of 'ideal type' bridge players. This will inform the questions in part 2, for testing the marketing strategy with non-bridge players. Ethics approval for the study was granted by the University of Stirling's General University Ethics Committee (reference 1852).

Sample and recruitment

For part 1, all registered attendees were recruited at the *Bridging Academia, Policy, and Practice Conference* (BAMSA, 2021a). Only individuals who were registered for the conference were eligible to take part in the workshops. Registration for the workshops was made available via the BAMSA website. The sample of participants included a diverse range of people from an international context, including academics, amateur and professional bridge players as well as policy makers involved in the bridge community. Participants were informed about the workshops through email correspondence in the run up to the conference, which included a participant information sheet and consent checklist for invitation to participate in the workshops. For inclusion in part 2, we invited non-bridge players aged between 18-35 years old who had no experience in playing bridge or had not engaged with the game for at least ten years; however, exceptions were made for those who had played other similar card games such as Whist. Invitation to the focus groups was advertised via the BAMSA website and Twitter account (@bridgemindsport). Snowball sampling prioritised the BAMSA teams' existing networks at the University of Stirling, sport and leisure related journals, governing bodies of sport, and local authorities across Scotland.

Data collection

Members of the research and marketing team (JM, SP, CB, EN, ZR) conducted the workshops in July 2021. Session 4B 'Marketing Bridge' was attended by 278 attendees (academics, administrators, and bridge players) from 59 countries across the world (BAMSA, 2001b). Attendees were asked to join via Microsoft Teams and were randomly allocated into one of five groups for the workshops. Attendees were actively encouraged to contribute to the questions asked by each session chairs. Each group focused on one ideal type of bridge player and questions were devised in a similar format for the purpose of comparison between groups. The first question acted as an icebreaker, followed by a series of questions that were informed by a behavioural change

framework - persuade/inform, remind/motivate, enable/embed and normalise/support - that was developed by our marketing partner, SHM. The behaviour change framework complemented the four ideal types that were fictionally created by members of the research team and marketing agency. Questions were structured around each ideal type of bridge player (self-improver, competitor, socialiser, mind-gamer) (see Appendix 1). In the workshops, participants were encouraged to discuss how these types fit in with (or not) their own lived experiences of bridge. Finally, a scenario was posed to the group that encouraged experimentation and creativity for how bridge could be developed for promoting the game to this particular type of player. The three focus groups in part 2 were facilitated by the marketing team (EN) and observed by members of the research team (JM, GH). The discussion followed a similar format to part 1 where the initial questions acted as an icebreaker, followed by a series of questions that were informed by the behavioural change framework. However, a key difference between them was that participants in part 2 were encouraged to discuss how the ideal types fit in with (or not) their own lived experiences of sport.

Data analysis

Members of the research team (JM, GH) developed poetic representations in the form of short stories (Faulkner 2019) based on the workshop discussions of ideal types of bridge players. According to Lupton (2019, p. 7) developing poetic representations entails pulling out 'evocative phrases' and considering how they could be combined to generate a narrative poetic representation tracing a story arc. Poetic transcription was informed by a grounded theory approach whereby code categories and themes were inductively developed from recurring language that was extracted out of the data (Leavy 2021, p. 91). Although the original wording from the phrases extracted from the stories was retained, members of the research team did make some slight edits to some of it, including sometimes changing punctuation and tense to make the phrases better fit together in the poetic format. The poetic representations were reviewed in discussion with another team member (SP). Part 2 used both deductive (i.e., topic guides) and inductive approaches (i.e., reading transcripts). The non-bridge players' sporting experiences were iteratively compared to the poetic representations, with ongoing refinements based on re-examining the ideal types and team discussions. A team member (JM) wrote up interim findings, which were then reviewed and refined in discussion with another (GH, who had read transcripts).

Results

We individually (JM, GH) present poetic representations for each of the ideal types – socialiser, competitor, self-improver, mind-gamer. Each ideal type stories were curated from the workshops that took place at the *Bridging Academia, Policy, and Practice Conference* with members of the bridge community (BAMSA, 2021b).

Part 1: Poetic representations

Socialiser's story (JM)

New players
Incentivise and publicise
"Make sure they feel really special"

A frightening experience
We don't play for competition
Must reduce competition
Longer games intimidate
Bridge needs more than competitive players to survive

In the comfort of one's home
In the spirit of fun
A common interest
Less serious and shorter games
Handicaps for a level playing field
To give a fighting chance
With breaks in play
Chit chat and food
Making new friends, partnerships, and communities

"Some clubs are obviously more welcoming than others"

Informal leagues, teaching online, bridge parties
Learn to be tolerant
Care for others
Mentored by experienced players
Clubs must be warmly welcoming

Encourage players to be social
"As much a social event as it is a bridge lesson"
Socialisers should motivate socialisers

Bridge is a social game

The socialiser (GH)

"You're with people"

It's a social thing
In the company of others
A place to feel comfortable
Be part of the group
About finding community
A social network

Making new friends, meeting old friends
Talk together
Opportunity to meet people
Opportunity to chat
Enjoy the company of friends
Bring a friend

Learn to play, teach others
A new activity for an existing group
Comfort in this

Play in a comfortable environment
Against players of a similar level
A warm greeting awaits you'll be made warmly welcome
Overcome your fear
No need to feel intimidated
In a welcoming club

In the spirit of fun
You have a fighting chance
Thanks to the handicapper
It's an even playing field
Encourage new players, nurture aspirations

Competitor's story (JM)

Are you wired for competition?

Earn points
Compete against top international players across the world
Bridge ranking
Now a serious player
"Hooked for life"
Have fun when you're winning
All games are competitive
No fun if it's not competitive
Are you brave enough to enter?

Win at all costs

Achieving results is exhausting
With conventions that are overwhelming for new players
But make sure you don't come last
Feeling humiliated and demoralised
Discouraged and not coming back
"Not wired for competition"

Start with the foundations
Need new systems
Bridge buddies
Players must stay for bridge to survive
Have different competition formats in schools
Need likeminded competitors from other sports
Excitement of competing in bridge

A competitive mindsport

The competitor (GH)
Wired for competition?

The need to compete
Regardless of level
Pit your wits against the top players – if brave enough to enter
Both fascinating and fun
Are you driven to win?

Measure your progress
Rate of progression
Positive emotion and self-esteem
The want to win; the drive to learn more

Good for the soul
But more than that
Nurture aspiration, offer support
Buddy up
Enjoyable experience, but learning exhausting
Open the door
To competition and excitement
A journey

Hooked for life

Self-improver's story (JM)

Partnership is key
Thrives on challenges
A problem solver
Set aside practice time

Not solely interested in winning
Don't need to be a 'good' player

Sometimes gets frustrated
Too much of a commitment
Break-up with partner
Need to up the game
Partner with a better player

Break down image and stereotype barriers
Inflexible teaching programmes
Great players might not be great teachers
"We shoot ourselves in the foot"

Make bridge appealing
A game for young and middle-aged people
Market from successes in Poker, Chess, and Cricket
Open to new ideas
Let players find their own path
Need investment like videogaming
Teach using social media and apps
Add colour, life, and change terminology
Reinvention of bridge to attract new players

"You never stop learning"

The self-improver (GH)

Continual development
It's not about winning
Seek fun and challenge
Wellbeing and friendship
Challenge yourself
You never stop learning

Partnership conflicts
As one strives to get better
Want differing things; mirrors one's life?
Seek a new partner?
Someone who's better
Break-up

Play as a partnership
An opportunity
A challenge perhaps?
Cooperation and competitiveness

Encourage through teaching
Best way to learn, to improve game
Teaching is a commitment; a big decision
Harness technology
Need to remain flexible
To attract new audiences

Bridge has an image; break down the barriers
Make it more appealing
Sexy, fashionable
Be open to new ideas; even reinvention?
Add colour

Much competition

Mind-gamer's story (JM)

An experienced player
Interested in people
Thinking about interaction
Watching rather than playing

More than socialising

Psychology of the game
Reading the opposition
A tactician
Assessing different styles of play

More than self-improvement

"Killer instinct"
A sinister undertone
Pulling a stroke
Drawing them into a trap
Breaking them down psychologically
Beating the person mentally
Lobbying for support from influential people
For their own benefit

More than a competitor

Promote constructive aspects of the game
Assessing different styles of play
New ideas and strategies
A deeper knowledge
"You can never be a total expert"

Every player is playing a mind-game of some sort

The mind-gamer (GH)

A complex character
Not easily understood
A tactician?
A psychologist?
A people watcher?
Experienced in bridge, not new to the game

A sinister undertone?
Disingenuous
Sole purpose is to put down others
"Pulled a stroke"
Reduced them to tears
Usually up to something
A means to an end

Part of being a competitive player?
Psychological angle
An improved understanding of the game
Assessing different styles of play
Drawn to limitless aspects of bridge
Using insight for an advantage
For their own benefit
Or is their interest genuine from a deeper knowledge of the game?
Continual development, the need to learn more
The unattainable strive to become a total expert

Is that a mind-gamer?

Part 2: Non-bridge players' perceptions of bridge

In Part 2, we provide insights into the focus group discussions of non-bridge players' sporting experiences.

> I don't think there's nothing in my mind right now that is like, '*I'm not ever playing bridge*' [or] '*no, I could never play it*'. No, '*I'd play*' but at the same time I'm not going to change my schedule to attend a bridge game.

As intimated in the quote above, the marketing of bridge seems to be important for persuading non-bridge players to play bridge. Bridge was considered an intellectual activity that requires high levels of concentration in a relaxing space around a table. When compared to sports more generally, which have been defined by a participant as 'instrumental[ly] and rationalised and rule bound … [by] governing bodies [of sport], bridge might be better considered a game or form of leisure'. Bridge was among a category of games like chess or darts, also not considered sports because they lack physicality. Games were associated with fun and excitement, particularly of their youth, where people learn by interacting with one another. Games were differentiated from sports, crafts, and hobbies but can still be serious and require high-level strategies. On the one hand, bridge was associated with the mind, 'there is something appealing about it because it makes you feel like you're getting smarter. You're doing something good for your mind'. On the other hand, there was ambiguity of bridge being considered a sport, as this was considered a step 'too far'. An alternative phrase 'mind *game*' was suggested because they 'take a lot of mental energy'. Some placed emphasis instead on the purpose of playing bridge:

> I don't see why it couldn't be both. So, things like physical sports like football is a game and a sport. So, for me, it would depend on the purpose of the people coming together. Are they coming to play or compete?

Having a purpose means that bridge is not 'mindlessly' reduced to a sport or a game; but rather 'it can be either of those things depending on the person who chooses to do it'. Purposes for playing bridge also relate to different ideal types of players: socialiser, mind-gamer, competitor, and self-improver. Participants associated with different ideal types depending on their purpose for different sports. For example, one participant associated with being a socialiser because there is 'time for chatting' when playing tennis with her family. Another considered themselves a competitor because they just 'want to win overall' and 'I don't like to just play games for the sake of playing them … I'm not just playing for the fun of it'. Others, however, distanced themselves from competition,

'I'm the opposite I tend to get quite scared off by competition and that turns stressful for me'. Although the bridge community identified less with the mind-gamer type, this was not the case for the non-bridge community. Indeed, two participants associated with the mind-gamer type by 'observ[ing] your opponent' to find out 'what goes on in people's minds'. Another said, 'I would like to participate in a mindsport because I'm gaining actual like strategy'. Some have moved from one type to another type, 'I would say when I was younger, I would have started out as a competitor, but as I've got older, I would realise I'm a socialiser'. Others found it difficult to choose between two types (socialiser and self-improver), and said that their identity depends on:

> Who I'm with … during [the COVID-19 pandemic] lockdown we were … barely mountain biking at all, [whereas] I have others with whom I'm much more kind of keen to get fit and keep up with them and get better on the downhills and improve

Learning by doing was preferred for playing bridge, 'I would want a brief introduction and then just learn as I go' with 'an insider who already plays and brings me in'. Although some mentioned visual aids to help them learn, others distanced themselves from books or 'having a lecture [as that] would feel artificial'. Yet, one did mention having at least 'guidelines' so that they would know 'they made a move'. With the COVID-19 pandemic, some would be encouraged to learn online by themselves first, and then once they had got to grips with it, they would play the card game in person. Others mentioned using YouTube on their iPad or videos and documentaries. Learning can also be specific to ideal types of players. For example, a participant said, 'if you like the competitor, who wants to learn and reflects and be better. You probably are going to skip all the kind of history and background'. Yet for another, who considered themselves more of a self-improver, they would 'need more of the history of it or culture and then I'd be more interested in playing'. Teaching was also seen to be more performative, taking place in small groups of players:

> It would be better to get started straight into it even if it was just smaller groups being talked at, but I feel … the size turns it into more of a conversation and you can then ask questions and then it breaks the ice a bit more

The image of bridge was stigmatised as something that 'takes place in an old people's home or in the old-fashioned social clubs'. Another said it was a 'dying art' of the past generation, since it was a game that their grandparents used to play. With that said, one could not see themselves 'ventur[ing] in one of these places'. Yet, there is also a social inclusion agenda here for older players, where in

one participant's community, bridge can encourage people to 'socialise with different generations'. This seems important especially for older people as they might 'start slowing down. It's when they stop doing stuff like these things'. By contrast, another participant mentioned how they had taken up poker during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the convenience of playing it remotely and not having 'any other alternatives or any other outlets for socialisation'. This was despite being 'really put off by casinos, which seems to be where poker is most frequently played'. This is similar to online bridge where international, national, regional and local bridge tournaments became digitised during the pandemic (Snellgrove & Punch, 2022). To counter the stigmatised image of bridge, having a presence on online platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, was seen as important for encouraging younger players to play bridge:

> A lot of influencers get sent stuff and then that becomes popular. … So maybe if they were playing bridge on their Instagram story, the people would be more so, '*Oh, I should look into that*' and then look it up and it might be something they are interested in. I think it would have an impact.

The evolution of other sports offers a useful comparison to bridge. For example, 'we've got electronic bikes [and] one of the groups I arrived with, the age ranges anywhere from 25 to, in some cases, like mid 60s'. Another gave the example of the *Queen's Gambit* which positioned chess within popular culture. A similar short film on bridge might be impactful for new players, 'if I saw it in a story or the series I was watching had it in, it would definitely get me interested in watching it'. While doing something similar for bridge might 'expose more people to the game', there is a risk that they 'don't really engage with the traditions and the rituals and the history of the game'. The novelty of the *Queen's Gambit* was considered short lived, 'how many of those are going to still be playing in 12 months' time [or] two years' time?' Indeed, not all participants are persuaded by pop culture, 'But like, me personally, I'm just not like swayed on pop culture. I play chess but it's not because of the *Queen's Gambit* … It's because I knew how to play since I was like seven'. Another comparison was made to Poker where the 'main orientation of most Poker players now is to make money. It's like for a lot of the Hollywood films I've seen … [than] its history and its culture'.

Non-bridge players might be persuaded to play bridge if playing the game was consistent with their ideal type. For example, one socialiser said the atmosphere would have to be more social by having snacks and beer with friends who were also interested in playing. This is consistent with another socialiser who would be persuaded if they saw bridge advertised as anti-competitive, 'come along

there's literally no pressure, this is like an introductory beginner level thing'. Some would be persuaded to play in a 'community that is willing to work with me' such as a university or in a bridge society. However, others perceived bridge clubs being 'so competitive and I'd feel like I wouldn't want to come along because I'd feel I'd be annoying them'. Indeed, another was worried about making a mistake which would make a 'fool of yourself' in front of experienced players. With that said, it seems important to be 'taught first … [from] some[one] with experience for me to want to play'. Another would find it beneficial to 'hook up with someone whose already like a good bridge player, but they're not going to take it too seriously like that kind of understanding you're a first-time bridge player'.

To encourage new players to play bridge one participant suggested a 'local community setting rather than a more inter-regional place'. For example, 'a bridge night at a café or somewhere that would be willing to give up the venue for an hour or however long you need … And they could get money out of it because they sell coffee'. However, another mentioned that bridge is also a game that takes place predominantly indoors and one participant encouraged aligning it with 'other activities that occur outdoors'. The atmosphere therefore seems important, 'I don't really like the thought of attending something like not really socially interacting with people. I'm quite a bubbly person and I like to chat to people, and I am very competitive, and I understand that some things have to be serious'. Consequently, there must be greater flexibility with the rules of bridge:

> Chang[ing] the rules … everything is ever changing, football changes every year. I mean there's always improvements made and maybe it's for the better. Maybe it's for the worse, but maybe initially to get people playing.

There seems to also be a lack of knowledge that hinders bridge's appeal to non-bridge players. For example, one participant said 'currently, I just don't know enough about it. It's like one other activity among others that I don't really know much about'.

Discussion

Bridging Insights aims to inform the development of a marketing strategy that will promote and increase the global reach of bridge to the next generation of players. There are three key findings from workshops and focus groups with the bridge and non-bridge community: 1. There was a consensus in recognising and identifying with the socialiser, self-improver, and competitor ideal types, but not the mind-gamer type; 2. Although the ideal types were evident in non-bridge players' experiences of sport, they might not be enough in themselves to persuade them to play bridge; and 3. Bridge was perceived as a form of leisure which might undermine its credibility as a mindsport.

A first key finding found a consensus for the socialiser, self-improver, and competitor ideal types, except the mind-gamer type. The socialiser was widely recognised by the bridge community from the social aspects of play. Social bridge takes place in a convivial atmosphere with food and drink to overcome the discomfort of being new to bridge. Bridge games are shorter and take place informally, in person and online. Experienced players are more tolerant of newcomers, encouraging and nurturing them through teaching and mentoring to establish friendships and partnerships. Although the social is evident in competition to a certain extent, the desire to win is less important than participation for the socialiser, which is less likely to intimidate newcomers. By contrast, the competitor has a 'competitive mindset'. The desire to compete was recognised in a constant striving to win at all costs which has led to the downfall of some esteemed international bridge players (Maclean, Punch & Xu, 2023). Competitors are driven by the desire to win, which can be exhilarating, exciting, and enjoyable yet often exhausting. Similarly, Punch, Russell & Graham (2022) found that the challenge of problem-solving and the ever-evolving nature of bridge gave players a particular thrill when competing in high-level events. Negative connotations described by competitors in our sample included feelings of being overwhelmed, humiliated, and demoralised.

The social aspect of play is also evident in partnerships, which was considered integral for the self-improver given the need for collaboration with playing partners (Punch et al. 2020). Self-improvement was not measured by being considered a 'good' player, but rather on betterment through challenge and continual learning and development. However, an excessive commitment to improve may consequently lead to feelings of frustration and the breakdown of playing

partnerships. The mind-gamer was not easily understood yet still generated a broader discussion than the other types. On the one hand, the 'mind' was associated with psychological aspects of bridge such as tactics and game plans. This suggests this type is a more experienced player who is often watching and reading opponents. On the other hand, 'gamer' was associated with a darker and more sinister side that exploits the weaknesses of more inexperienced players.

A second key finding was that although the ideal types were evident in non-bridge players' experiences of sport, they might not be enough in themselves to persuade them to play bridge. Sports participation was recognised as a social endeavor through socialising by eating and drinking when playing with family members. The competitor type was associated with winning and not for the sake of taking part (i.e., the fun of it). However, competition was also associated with feelings of anxiety and stress, which suggests a need for a balance between the socialiser and competitor types. Self-improvement went beyond playing to learning the history and culture of a sport, which emphasises the importance of marketing bridge to non-bridge players. Mind-gamer was associated with observing in order to understand the strategies that players use when playing bridge. A notable difference between non-bridge players and the bridge community was that non-bridge players did not associate the mind-gamer with the darker side of sport. This darker side of using the mind to exploit the weaknesses of others was discussed only by the bridge community. The strategic ploys which players use at the bridge table (see Punch & Snellgrove, 2022) could be used to entice other mind-gamers to try bridge. Some of the non-bridge players also transitioned from one type to another (Punch, Russell & Graham, 2022). For example, one performed as a competitor when they were younger but are now more of a socialiser, whereas another transitioned from a socialiser to a self-improver. This shows that the ideal types are fluid and do not stand still.

A third key finding was that bridge was perceived as a form of leisure which might undermine its credibility as a mindsport. While there was agreement surrounding the 'mind' as a central element of playing bridge, the comparison to sports was contentious due to its lack of physicality (Kobiela, 2018). Alternatively, the phrase 'mind-game' was suggested as an alternative. This is consistent with Brkjacic et al. (2017, p. 27) who defined mind-games as a probability-based game that requires "high intellectual performance, including attention, concentration, and decision making". It is worth noting that there is a debate on whether mindsports should be considered as sports or not (Kobiela, 2018). Recently, Scott and Punch (2023) have argued that competing in bridge is

sensorial, emotional, and embodied, meaning that mindsports are more physical than perhaps initially thought. They suggest that physicality is linked not just to our body, but also to our mind and world. However, as our research participants pointed out, the terminology will depend on the ideal type of player. For example, mind-game might be more conducive to the socialiser and self-improver types, whereas mind-sport might be more conducive to the competitor and mind-gamer types.

It is important to acknowledge the strengths and limitations of the study. A strength was the collaboration between academics and a marketing agency in constructing the ideal types. Another strength was that BAMSA's annual conference enabled international outreach to the bridge community which provided a suitable sounding board for the ideal types. A limitation of the study was a lower-than-expected sample size with non-bridge players, but this was expected given that it was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

1. **First recommendation: Reinvent the image of bridge in order to make it more appealing to a wider audience**. Image and stereotype barriers were consistent among the bridge and non-bridge community. To overcome this, members from the non-bridge community suggested using influencers to promote bridge via social media. Whilst it may be difficult and costly to produce a bridge version of the *Queen's Gambit*, professional photos and shorter video clips showing a diverse range of younger players would disrupt the traditional image of bridge as an older person's game. Such images and clips could be used on different social media platforms as part of a marketing campaign targeting distinct types of gamers and potential bridge players.

2. **Second recommendation: Use existing research findings to develop resources to show a different side to bridge**. For example, the motivations and social rewards that drive elite bridge players to compete in international tournaments (Punch et al., 2022) could be used to create multimedia resources to transform the image of the game.

3. **Third recommendation (for clubs and players): Make sure to give new players a warm welcome.** Personal contact is vital. The bridge community highlighted differences between clubs, where some seem to be more welcoming than others.

4. **Fourth recommendation (for clubs): Strike a balance between the socialiser and competitor types**. Non-bridge players expressed a reluctance to take up bridge due to a perception of clubs being too competitive. This is particularly pertinent with the slow return to face-to-face bridge after the global bridge community shifted to digital bridge during the pandemic. Before Covid-19, some clubs may have been able to run specific sessions for more social or more serious players, but in the 'new normal' it is more practical to offer mixed ability games (BAMSA, 2021c). Clubs need to ensure that recent learners and socialisers are welcomed and enabled to feel comfortable playing alongside the more experienced players and the competitor types.

5. **Fifth recommendation: Experiment with new playing formats**. This could be achieved by using modified rules when playing bridge in different places (e.g., community venue or café).

6. **Sixth recommendation: Promote a deeper knowledge of bridge to encourage experimentation with different playing style**. Ways to achieve this could involve, for example, role playing the ideal types and strategies of play, for example, pre- or post-game discussions and using video technology to analyse hands.

Conclusion

This study aimed to develop a marketing strategy that will promote and increase the global reach of bridge to the next generation of players. To do so, we set out a two-part emergent research design with the bridge and non-bridge communities. Part 1 introduced four ideal types (socialiser, competitor, self-improver, mind-gamer) in workshop format with members of the international bridge community (players, administrators, clients and so on). The ideal types were then poetically represented based on the bridge communities' experiences of playing or being involved in bridge. Subsequently, the ideal types were tested in part 2 with non-bridge players to see how well they fit in with (or not) their experiences of sport in general.

There were three key findings that were brought about from parts 1 and 2. Firstly, we found a consensus for all the ideal types (socialiser, self-improver, and competitor), except the mind-gamer type. The socialiser was widely recognised by the bridge community from the social aspect of play (i.e., having food and drink when playing shorter games, plus more time for chatting during the game). Although this was evident to a certain extent with the competitor, the latter had a stronger

focus on winning over social participation. For the competitor, socializing is more likely to take place after the game, combined with post-play analysis (or 'post-mortems'). The self-improver focused on betterment through partnership building. The mind-gamer was not easily understood by the bridge community in the way that the 'gamer' could manipulate the 'mind'. This calls for further exploration of gamers in other sports (e.g., esports).

Secondly, although the ideal types were evident in non-bridge players' experiences of sport, they might not be enough in themselves to persuade them to play bridge. Importantly, the types were not seen as passive but fluid in the way that non-bridge players transitioned from one type to another (competitor to socialiser; socialiser to self-improver). Thus, the types can be dynamic and overlap in ways that may reflect the varied reasons that people play bridge with different partners in different contexts. Thirdly, bridge was perceived as a form of leisure which might undermine its credibility as a mindsport. Mind-game was proposed as an alternative to mind-sport but as this study has shown both can be used because 'mind-game' or 'mind-sport' is dependent on a player's ideal type. Tailored marketing approaches could maximise the distinct factors that attract and incentivise certain types of potential players. We now encourage others (academics, amateur and professional bridge players, clubs, policy makers involved in the bridge community) to market the ideal types based on the recommendations of this study.

References

BAMSA. (2021a). Marketing bridge. *Bridging Academia, Policy and Practice Conference,* University of Stirling: Bridge: A MindSport for All Online Conference, 1 July 2021. https://bridgemindsport.org/bridging-academia-policy-practice-conference/conference-2021-day-4-session-4b/

BAMSA. (2021b). Summary report session 4B 'Marketing Bridge'. Accessible https://bridgemindsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Summary-Report-for-Session-4B-1.pdf

BAMSA. (2021c). Impact of a global pandemic on bridge. *Bridging Academia, Policy and Practice Conference,* University of Stirling: Bridge: A MindSport for All Online Conference, 29 June 2021. https://bridgemindsport.org/bridging-academia-policy-practice-conference/conference-2021-day-2/

Brkljacic, T., Lučić, L., & Sučić. (2017). Well-being, motives and experiences in live and online game settings: Case of contract bridge. *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations*. *9*(4), 19-43. doi: 10.4018/IJGCMS.2017100102

Faulkner, S.L. (2019). *Poetic Inquiry. Craft, Method and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Guillianotti, R. (2002). Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A taxonomy of spectator identities. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, *26*(1), pp.25-46. doi: 10.1177/0193723502261003

Kobiela, F. (2018). Should chess and other mind sports be regarded as sports? *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, *45*(3), 279-295. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.2018.1520125

Leavy, P. (2020). *Method Meets Art. Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Lupton, D. (2019). 'Things that matter': poetic inquiry and more-than-human health literacy. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, *13*(2), pp.267-282. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1690564

Maclean, J., Punch, S. & Xu, M. (2023). Card confessions: Digital forms of deviance in the mindsport bridge. In: I. Lamond and R. Edwards, eds. *Deviant Leisure and Events of Deviance: A Transgressive Compendium*. London: Springer.

Nicholson, E., Ballinger. C., Biriotti, M., Maclean, J., & Punch, S. (2021) *Thinking outside the 'bidding box': marketing bridge to new players*, 4th International Bridge Conference, Bridging Academia, Policy and Practice, 1 July 2021, University of Stirling.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yERUI_qy56E

Russell, Z., Punch, S., & McIntosh, I. (2022). 'Blurring the boundaries between leisure and work: professionals as devotees in the mind-sport bridge,' *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-021-00099-y

Punch, S., & Snellgrove, M. (2021). Playing your life: Developing strategies and managing impressions in the game of bridge. *Sociological Research Online*, *26*(3), 601-619. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780420973043

Punch, S., Russell, Z., & Cairns, B. (2020). (Per)forming identity in the mindsport bridge: self, partnership and community. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *56*(6), 804-822. doi: https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690220959648

Punch, S., Russell, Z., & Graham, E. (2022). Serious leisure experience in a dyadic pursuit: elite player motivations and participation in tournament bridge. *Leisure Studies*, *41*(1), 12-27. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2021.1942524

Scott, D., & Godbey, G. (1992). An analysis of adult play groups: social versus serious participation in contract bridge. *Leisure Sciences*, *14*(1), 47-67.

Scott, D., & Punch, S. (2023). The physicality of mindsports through elite bridge players' sensorial experiences: presence, confidence, and bodies, *The Sociological Review*.

Snellgrove, M. L. & Punch, S. (2020) *Challenges, Issues and Solutions facing National Bridge Organisations in Europe,* BAMSA Report for the European Bridge League, Stirling: University of Stirling. Available http://www.eurobridge.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Bridge-A-Mind-Sport-for-All-Miriam-Snellgrove.pdf

Snellgrove, M. L. and Punch, S. (2022). Bridge during a time of disruption: Pandemic playing, everyday habits and situated writing. In: Finkle, R & Sharp, B. (Eds.) *Leisure in the Pandemic: Re-imagining Interaction and Activity during Crisis.* London: Routledge.