Gamification Strategies the Ultimate Tool for Events Marketing

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The number, variety and type of national and international events have exponentially increased. That is why the event's organizers should use the latest strategies to attract and keep not only direct and indirect event audience, but also the organizing team. Event Gamification is one of the strategies whose impact and the experience would be more effective. Events are detail moments in the individuals' life, related to various occasions such as baptism, name day, birthday, marriage, funerals, or to organization moments, through which they want to transmit specific messages, or to increase brands awareness or sales increase in order to achieve their marketing objectives. A strategy, that is adopted by organizations, is consigned to consumers and employees, to stakeholders in general, at the same time engaging them, that defines us and has realized our development both as individuals and as a society and brought us to the level we have reached so far, is the Gamification. At all times, people have tried to be better, to get more skills, to be stronger, luckier, and more victorious and even to boast of these results. Nowadays, people try, through various forms and in different situations to be the first. Even if we talk about the one who first arrives at work, the one who first goes home, the first car at the traffic lights, the one who first gets up the escalator when exiting the subway, the person who first gets on or off the bus or the tram, the one who enters first the exam room to find the best seat, the one who first takes the new merchandise off the shelves, or about the person who first gets the order or the check and the examples may go on. Within this article, market research results related to Events Market will be presented, aiming at implementing a more coherent events targeting and positioning process, using the most suitable marketing tools to attract and cause loyalty on behalf of a greater and greater number of participants.

Keywords: events, gamification, events marketing, gamification of events

Events role in society development

Ever since ancient times (Allen, O'Toole & Harris & McDonnell, 2011), people wanted to mark, through conducted events, various moments that affected their lives like: the change of seasons, the different phases of the moon and the return of nature to life every spring. Special events such as the Chinese New Year, the Dionysus rituals performed during ancient Greece, medieval

European carnivals, myths or rituals, were all created to interpret and celebrate astral changes. Even nowadays, characters like Santa Claus can be considered a product of Western culture that has its origins in ancient myths, archetypes and ancient celebrations.

In terms of history, events (Hentea, 2008) have existed since antiquity, among the most recorded ones being listed the triumphal processions of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs and Mesopotamian despots. Rome leaders and emperors, beginning with Julius Caesar, who was a master in directing and operating propaganda of military ceremonies in the honor of a victorious returning from war, designed moments whose aim was to acquire the admiration and the political support of the Roman citizens, simultaneously associating the traditional symbols of the Eternal City with: victory laurels, eagles of the Roman legions, fascia authority, through organizing fights with gladiators, slaves and animals, providing population with "Panem et circenses", so that they could agree to all the decisions they had made, no matter if they were bringing a real benefit to them or it was an unnecessary cost of human and financial resources that they would lose when they decided to conquer a new region.

Aware of a person's need to banish everyday boredom of a monotonous life and to have fun by participating together with other people in an entertaining show, over time there were many organizations / persons who, through events, tried to manipulate and also to control the masses' reactions. The Olympic Games were founded in ancient Greece (http://www.ancientgreece.com/s/Olympics/) over 2,500 years ago and they were held within a religious festival, dedicated to Zeus.

The festival and the games were held at Olympia, a rural Sanctuarium built in the western part of the Peloponnese. The first Olympic Games were held in 776 BC, with a unique event: a running race with a length of about 200 meters, called "stade". The games were so highly regarded by the Greeks that their running had stopped any wars and the organized truces were closely supervised. Triggering and conducting crusades (Godfrey, 1980) represent a model of successful papacy events. The one who triggered the Crusades, the initiator of certain campaigns as mass phenomena, was Pope Urban II.

Almost 1,000 years later, Hitler (Yourman, 1939) was successfully using the same events recipes: military parades with paroxysm audiences, simple and resounding slogans, confiscation of traditional symbolism. The Soviet regime and the other communist regimes (Hentea, 2011) have always paid attention to details when planning anniversary celebrations within the communist calendar, to make the most of the event: military parades, technique, crowds, flags, banners, floats, blending authoritarian political messages with the emotional effects of a military force demonstration.

From a social perspective (Schafer-Mehdi, 2009), events satisfy the need for fun, travel, people's direct communication, contrary to the use of internet which destroys it. Moreover, the event allows the identification of more heterogeneous groups, due to the individualism development at the human being level.

Events are detail moments in the individuals' life, related to various occasions such as baptism, name day, birthday, marriage, funerals, or to organization moments, through which they want to transmit specific messages, or to

increase brands awareness or sales increase in order to achieve their marketing objectives. A particular example is the event conducted by the Australian state, in connection with the hiring process of a person, entitled "The Best Job in The World '(DG, 2009), for an island administrator post where over 34,000 people have applied for, from more than 200 countries. By the end of the campaign, around the world there has been generated advertising for Hamilton Island, worth over 200 million dollars, advertising which won three awards at the International Advertising Festival in Cannes, being considered a very successful marketing campaign.

Another example is the TV show with Donald Trump's potential employees (Vrinceanu, 2007), "The Apprentice". The show is actually a contest between two teams of eight competitors each, fighting for the opportunity to work as Trump Organization CEO for one year, for an income of $ 250,000.

Another recent example belongs to Heineken Brewing Company. When people wanted to get employed (Heineken Company, 2013) they were filmed without knowing. The interview started as a usual one, but the participants were put into unusual situations, being tested their resistance to stress and also the way they interacted. They were led hand held tight from the entrance of the building directly to the office where the interview was going to take place. During the interview the employer began simulating a heart attack. The last test, a fire simulation, where firefighters were asked to assist in helping to save a person. Out of all the candidates, the best 3 finalists were chosen and the marketing community members could vote their favorite on an online internal platform. The result was announced within a grand event, on Juventus Stadium. The winner was asked to help with waving a huge banner, while on the stadium screen appeared the congratulations for obtaining his *dream job*.

As it can be seen, almost any individual's or organization's activity, that, at first, may be considered unimportant, can be transformed into an event to get media attention and hence the public.

According to the dictionary, the event (Romanian Academy, 2009) is defined as „an important coincidence in social or private life, of great significance, a local and instant phenomenon, or even a remarkable fact which can be used both by individuals, but especially by organizations in order to communicate with the stakeholders, and particularly to persuade them to change their behavior towards them, or towards the products / services they offer or event the ideas related to ecology and not only."

Events Marketing (Florescu, Mâlcomete & Pop, 2003) tends to occupy a special place in the cultural landscape of contemporary communication, being considered a powerful vector which allows the differentiation within the dull traditional advertising space, mainly using media communication, causing a real "emotional shock" that gives energy to this form of action put into objectives service, while taking into account the dynamics of the free time chosen to be spent by the stakeholders. It can be also regarded as a fundamental action of original strategy based on emotional processes mobilization at the level of those whose organize events and event audience, whether they are part of direct or indirect audience, so as to modify their behavior and attitudes towards the organization in a suitable direction.

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Closer to nowadays, within the current technological potential conditions, events offer multiple solutions of messages effective transmission to greater and greater audiences. More often than not, such events are positioned within marketing as a tool of communication, having equal rights with the other ingredients of modern communication mix: advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing.

By definition, events have a beginning and an end, as some temporal phenomena and depending on the organizing entities marketing general objectives, cyclic or acyclic, these planned events have a very well-defined time schedule and communicated to stakeholders beforehand.

Events Gamification

A strategy, that is adopted by organizations, is consigned to consumers and employees, to stakeholders in general, at the same time engaging them, that defines us and has realized our development both as individuals and as a society and brought us to the level we have reached so far, is the Gamification.

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Nowadays, people try, through various forms and in different situations to be the first. Even if we talk about the one who first arrives at work, the one who first goes home, the first car at the traffic lights, the one who first gets up the escalator when exiting the subway, the person who first gets on or off the bus or the tram, the one who enters first the exam room to find the best seat, the one who first takes the new merchandise off the shelves, or about the person who first gets the order or the check and the examples may go on.

It can be stated that our competitive spirit (Moise & Cruceru, 2014) defines us as people and species, and it can be found in almost all the activities we are daily undertaking. Our competitive spirit has been instilled since our birth. Games really influence our lives, being always a more interesting attraction than a simple presentation or the display of a product / service. Our way of boasting when talking about the results, can be done online, both on the sites of certain organizations or through social networks that allow this. Games are not only for children, but also for adults, there are gaming consoles that address only to this market segment.

Although worldwide consumers discard the expensive forms of entertainment (Gräser, 2009) and also leisure activities, due to the economic crisis, not the same thing happens with computer games or consoles. This type of sales increases even if unemployment is on the rise, because people looking for a job have more available time and their financial resources are lower an cannot afford other forms of entertainment which are more expensive than spending their free time at home. Such kind of entertainment requires longer periods of time to carry out, considering that some games, even if you are a single player or more are involved, last at least two months, depending on the degree of the difficulty chosen by the player.

Video games sector has proven to be more powerful (Terdiman, 2008) than other sectors, although no one will better survive than the companies that

produce cheap spirits, but the technological era, we are in, makes this sector record increases and thus, profits to invest in new video games production development. New terms have also appeared such as "electronic sports" or "esports", although at first glance, it can be considered a contradiction in terms because it involves video games, which require the players to stay in a fixed location, and a minimal physical effort, but new devices have been developed by companies producing gaming consoles, that record and respond only to commands made by the player's entire body, including the head, hands, feet, and in this way receiving a higher score. However, the reality is that in recent years, these competitions have evolved from a group of passionate fans of such games to international tournaments with millions of spectators and substantial prizes in money. Considered to be the sport of the 21st century (Lee, 2014), the latest Electronic Sports League tournament of Dota 2 competition was held at Madison Square Garden in New York in front of 5,000 spectators and watched online via Twitch platform by over 10 million people.

Gamification (Hackathorn, 2012) integrates games dynamic in the company's website, social media, business promotion and fairs / exhibitions to attract more visitors, and at the same time to involve the audience, even if we speak about potential or actual customers or team members participating in the event. If visitors can be attracted through various contests, raffles, games and even motivate them to play different roles as detectives; regarding the employees, they can be motivated by rewarding those who not only reach their target, but also to exceed it by attracting many more visitors, contracts, collecting contacts, etc.

Gamification strategies can easily be adopted and used by organizations that communicate through events, during the event, before it takes place, the pre-event, during event and post-event, whether it takes place physically or online. The number of indirect audience of the event will considerably increase. Those who participate in the competitions will keenly follow them to see who the winner was or even to review the videos during the event where they can see themselves. Only the organizing entity imagination limits shall determine which gamification strategies are the best and how far they should go to draw an ever larger direct and indirect audience. Games should be designed to be attractive, as well as to involve the players' perspicacity and skills.

The research methodology

An important element of the events is the loyalty of both direct and indirect audience of the event and this can be done through gamification strategies, so that the delivered experience for the stakeholders should be unique for meddle and long term as well. For this the organizations wish to modify their behavior towards them and towards the products and services they sell. Taking into consideration that gamification strategies have a bigger rate of success among youngsters, who, generally speaking are more enthusiastic when it comes to competitions and that is why most of the events aim to target this segment of the population.

In this respect, there has been made a research on youngsters, aged between 20 and 25, as the share in the total population is 8% (The National Institute of Statistics, 2014), and in few years they will start families and with a view to observing the event participants' behavior, focusing on the following objectives:

    a) The identification of main attending events type;
    b) The main reasons for not attending events;
    c) The identification of the most efficient way of promoting the event;
    d) The identification of the most successful gamification strategies;
    e) The identification of attending costs type.

The study is based on a sample of 258 persons, at the level of both rural and urban citizens, using the probability of research results guarantee of 95%, where t= 1.96 and sample error representing ±4%. The respondents selection used snowball sampling method, taking into account their residence, sex, age, and income, criteria which assured a well-defined structure of the sample, in accordance with selected sample.
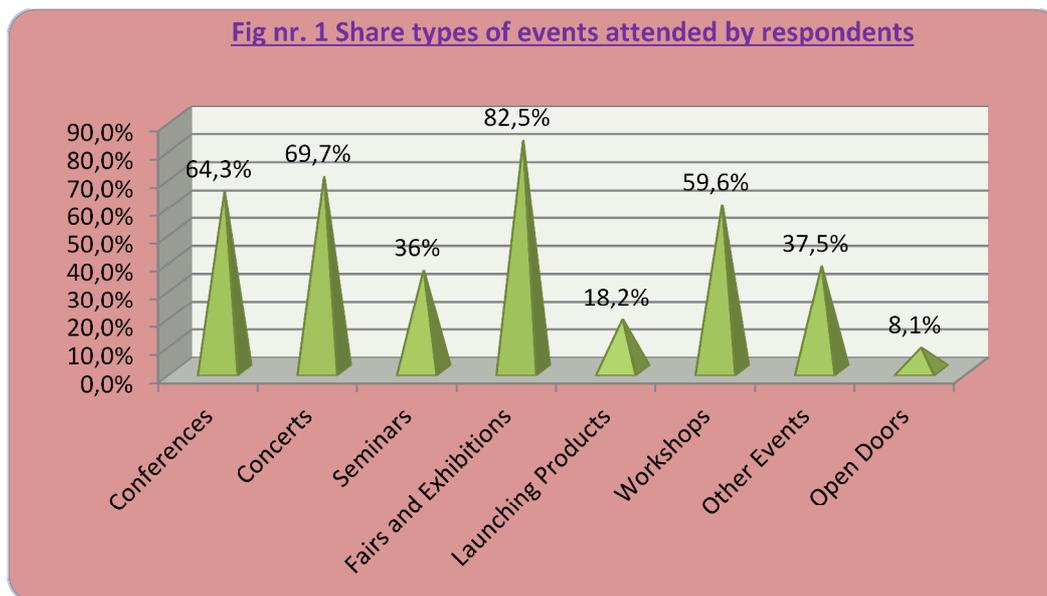
Results

On the basis of the research made on 258 respondents, we can notice that they often attend events and are also attracted by different organizers' gamification strategies.

As you can see in Fig. 1, among the most attending events, the first place belongs to fairs and exhibitions, having a 82.5 % percentage, the second place is related to concerts, with a percentage of 69.5%, a solid argument being the age and their available time, as they are still unemployed. On the third place, we can find the conferences, with a percentage of 64.3%, closely followed by workshops (59.6%). The last place belongs to „Open Doors" events, having a percentage of only 8.1%, as a result of an insufficient promotion, since the organizers believe that these do not represent an efficient investment.

Other events, like shows, ballet, General Assemblies of Stakeholders, launches and so on, represent a percentage of 37.5%.

Within the previous studies, the question for the respondents was positively asked, related to what they wish for and what attracts them when talking about an event.

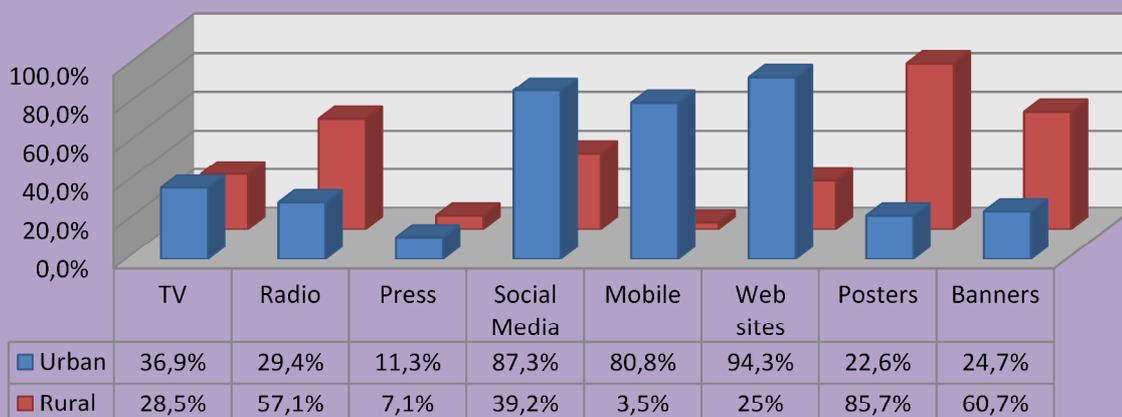Fig nr. 1 Share types of events attended by respondents

Through this research, we wanted to discover which were the main obstacles that made people not to attend a certain event, no matter if it was for free, or not. The results can be seen in Fig. nr. 2, called „The percentage of people who do not attend a certain event", where the event concept represents the main cause of not attending it (85,6%). A second reason is the ticket price (75,5%), being considered a strong barrier for the respondents. With regard to the location, there has been taken into consideration the transportation way and also the accommodation during the event, in case the event does not run in their own city or country, a suitable reason for the percentage of 68,2%. Through other not-attending reasons, there have been mentioned the lack of awareness for the guest speakers, not enough advertising, but also because their friends are not going to attend the event.

Fig nr. 2 The percentage of people who do not attend a certain event
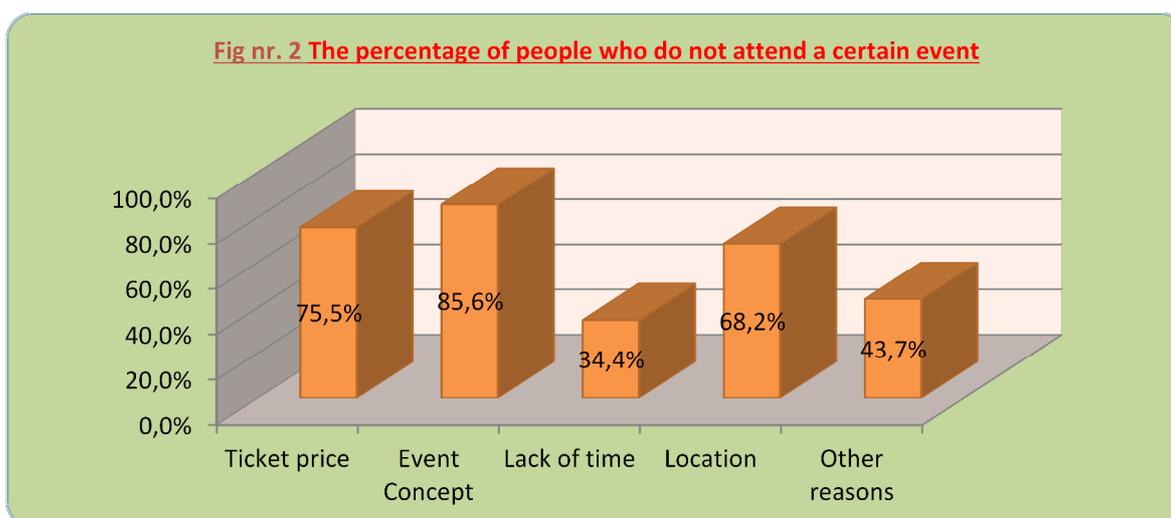
Throughout this analysis there has been also assessed the significance of the link between the main ways of promoting an event, the gamification strategies used by organizations and a number of direct socio-demographic
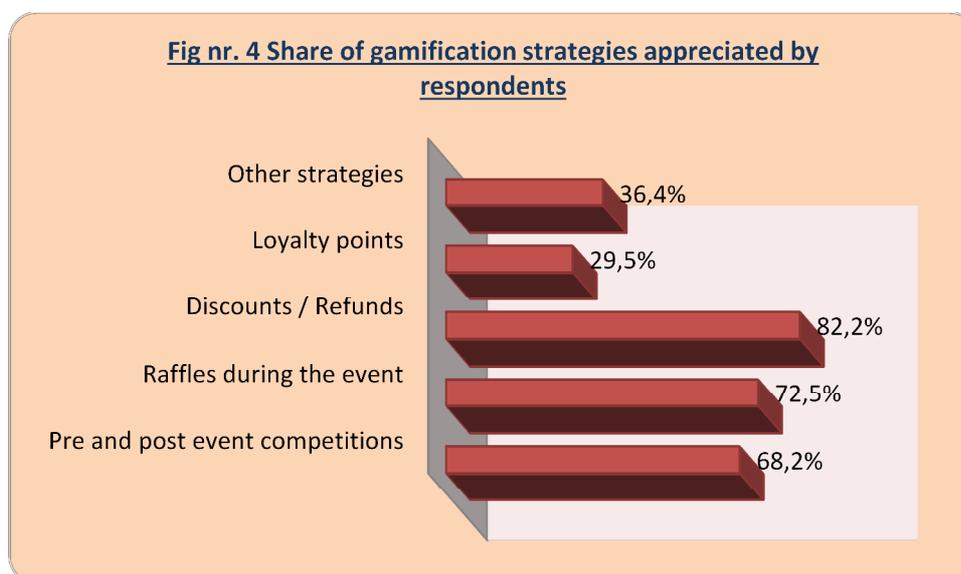
characteristics of the audience, such as area of residence, gender and income. Organizations, that address through various communication channels when they want to attract direct and indirect audience to an event, have found a correlation between the residence and the main promotional channels used, as it can be seen in Figure nr. 3, the most used ways of promoting urban events are the websites of the event, or banner's which are posted on other websites that are not owned by the company organizing the event, with a share of 94,3%. Social media networks own a share of 87,3% which demonstrates the high degree of development and use by both companies and individuals, taking into account that segmentation, targeting and positioning of the event can be made much more easily and can direct the potential audience towards the event, while in rural areas it is used at a rate of only 39,2%. The share of television and print media are inscribed on the downtrend that can be seen worldwide, due to the increase of Internet users, which enables that both of the most TV stations and certain newspapers or magazines be present online. Promoting events on mobile is extensively used in urban areas at a frequency of 80,8% relying on the degree of endowment with those devices for the people who live in cities, compared to only 3,50% for those in rural areas. Instead, posters and banners are widely used in rural areas and are a means of more accurate information, thus accounting for 85,7% and 60,7%.

Fig nr. 3 The percentage and corelation of the main ways of promoting an event by area of residence

	TV	Radio	Press	Social Media	Mobile	Web sites	Posters	Banners
■ Urban	36,9%	29,4%	11,3%	87,3%	80,8%	94,3%	22,6%	24,7%
■ Rural	28,5%	57,1%	7,1%	39,2%	3,5%	25%	85,7%	60,7%

In Figure nr. 4, we can see the main gamification strategies appreciated by respondents, conducted by the firms that organize events, organizations communicating through events, the sponsors of the events, or third parties. The strategies that hold the largest share, of 82,2%, is represented by discounts or refund of the ticket price, which best fits the profile of the event and the direct and indirect audience for each and everyone of them. Raffles during the event are favored by the participants at a rate of 72,5%. A high degree of appreciation, of 68,2%, is shown for the pre and post event competitions, provided that the value of the prices is consistent. Among other strategies,

holding a share of 36,4%, refer to the promotional products offered at the event, or photos, and short films that are later posted on social networks, websites or even telecast as pieces of news.

Fig nr. 4 Share of gamification strategies appreciated by respondents

Strategy	Share
Other strategies	36,4%
Loyalty points	29,5%
Discounts / Refunds	82,2%
Raffles during the event	72,5%
Pre and post event competitions	68,2%

Of course, in addition to these gamification strategies, the organizations have to decide upon which ones to adopt, have to take into account the cost paid by the audience, to take part in these competitions, no matter when they take place, pre, post or during the event. Thus, it can be seen in Fig. nr. 5 the share of the cost for participating in the competition and the income levels. The income was divided into three levels: below the minimum wage, between 901-2000 Ron, 2001 Ron and over. Most organizations use several ways to involve the direct and indirect audience in a contest, and these include interactions on social networks, ticket price, and extra charge, or other forms of participation, such as the requirement for wearing certain outfits; once a year in July, customers who come to any restaurant Chick-Fil-A (Armstrong & Kotler, 2014) dressed as a cow, receive a free meal, and consequently in the last year about 60.000 customers came dressed like that on the "Cow Appreciation day";or only the owners of certain cars and motorcycles brands may take part in the events, such as does conducted Harley-Davidson. Most respondents, 62,4% prefer to give a "like" and "share" on social networks, especially those with incomes below the minimum wage, i.e. 82,7% of respondents, and only 33,7 % are willing to pay an extra charge besides the ticket price to participate in the contest conducted on the occasion. Regarding payment of the ticket price, and the automatic enrollment in the competition has a fairly high percentage for both those with incomes between levels of 901-2000 Ron 2001 Ron and over 2001, 69,6% and 77,3% respectively.

Fig. nr 5 The share of the cost for participating in the competition and the income levels

Conclusions

Gamification used for running an event, not only increases the event awareness, but also the potential audience involvement rate, and hence, increasing the chance of becoming direct audience of the event.

These strategies can be adopted in case of different kinds of events, whether we are talking about concerts (for instance, the concerts organized by VOLSKBANK- they organize contests before the concerts, and the prizes consisted in concert tickets. They can also be applied within the scientific conferences, such as "Advanced Research in Scientific Areas" (http://arsa-conf.com/arsa-award/), this year they are celebrating the 3rd edition, where they offer a prize of 100 Euro to the best 3 papers, selected on special criteria. All papers presented within the conference automatically enter the competition. In addition, the winners are going to be guest speakers within the next edition, with all the expenses paid by the organizers.

Using gamification strategies for advertising a certain event and increasing the participants' involvement rate, can satisfy the needs for information, competition, socializing, acknowledging their own merits or social status.

Acknowledgments

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