

Abstract. *The rationale of this paper is to highlight how a marketing event can be used as a promotional tool by a sporting organization. A case study approach has been chosen for the demonstration. The major findings of the research are that integrating a marketing event in the promotional mix can help a football league to better identify itself with its target consumers and to increase its brand value, while also offering an unforgettable experience for the participants. There are two important implications this paper could have. The first one would be to help researchers and practitioners realize that there is a difference between a sporting event and a marketing event. The confusion will be cleared in the Introduction of the case study. The second one would be to show sport marketers how a given event can be marketed. Therefore, the paper makes another difference, between „marketingevents” and „eventmarketing. Eventmarketing represents the core of the paper: the stages of event production, event promotion and event distribution (consumption) are largely investigated.*

Keywords: sport marketing, marketing events, eventmarketing.

IMPROVING SPORT BRANDS’ REPUTATION THROUGH MARKETING EVENTS

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1. Introduction

Due to the high competition for clients and to the many promotional messages which are sent every day, marketers have searched and discovered a new way to attract the attention of their costumers: event marketing. Event marketing was first a practice (Nickel, 1998) and, because it proved to have success, marketing theoreticians began to grant more and more attention to this topic (Cunningham, Taylor, 1994). Eventhough the US-American and the German Marketing Schools have both intensively researched event marketing, definitions of this subject lack homogeneity. Manfred Bruhn (1997) thinks that unity in definitions misses because of the short history of event marketing as part of the communicational mix of marketing. Other authors believe that the difficulty of identifying a common accepted definition lies in the complexity of the event types, which may differ from cultural ones, to sporting or political ones (Graham, Goldblatt, Delpy, 1995).

As a matter of fact, one of the biggest confusions made in event marketing is due to this complexity. Marketers tend to confuse the different types of events; they do not differentiate, for example, between a sporting event and a marketing event. A sporting event is based on competition between athletes or teams facing eachother in order to prove who or which is the best. What a sporting event sells is rivalry (Szymanski, 2009). Rivalry between two or more sides which compete for the same prize. A sporting event does not have any promotional objectives, but just the goal of determining a winner out of more participants. It is true that sporting events need marketing so that they can be sold, distributed and made known to consumers, but this does not transform them into marketing events. Marketing events have communicational or promotional goals, helping their organizers attract new consumers or to strengthen costumer loyalty. Marketing events can have many topics, sport being just one of them, next to literature, arts, science or music. For example, a company may launch a new product on the market within a concert that it finances or within a football match that it organizes. Just in this case is a football match a marketing event. Some Sport Marketing authors do not consider events as being promotional tools for sport leagues (Smith, 2008; Schwarz, Hunter, 2008). They consider a sport league as an event in itself, which can be promoted through advertising, public relations or personal selling. Indeed, a sport league is an event, but a sporting one.

Another confusion is caused by the difference between event marketing and the marketing of events. Two directions of research can be identified. One of them regards events as marketing communication tools, applied in order to add value to the organizing entity. The other one regards events as given situations which need marketing in order to succeed. The first direction is about making marketing through using events, the second one is about making marketing for events. German literature separates „Marketingevents” from „Eventmarketing” (Nickel, 1998, p. 7), as can be seen in Table 1.

Bruhn (1997) defines „Marketingevents” as using an event as an instrument which is part of the communicational mix, alongside advertising, direct selling or

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public relations. Inden (1993) sees events as a platform that is used by companies for their marketing communications. Such an event, in Inden's opinion, should be organized as a special occasion, with its attenders selected from a clear targeted group. Nickel (1998) notes that marketing events have a clear planing, and their goal is to create experiences for the attenders, so that the latter ones can feel the emotions that an event plans to transmit. Once they feel the emotions, the attenders will associate them with the brand which is organizing the event. Thus, events create a strong association between senses of the attenders and brand, often once and for all. In most of the cases the emotions are positive, so the association with the brand will also be postive.

Table 1

Differences between „Marketingevents” and „Eventmarketing”

	Marketingevents	Eventmarketing
Event is...	... a marketing tool which is part of the communicational mix.	... a given situation which needs to be marketed.
Relationship to value	Adds value to the entity which organizes the event.	Needs to be marketed in order to win added value, for itself.
Marketing is done...	... through events.	... for events, in service of the events.

2. Event Marketing in *Liga Economistului*

Liga Economistului is the football championship of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. Since spring 2008, the competition is organized each year. There are ten participating teams, each one representing a faculty of the Academy. According to the statute of the competition each team has to consist of students as well as of professors. There are three competitions to be played: the championship, where each team plays against each other once, and, at the end of the nine matchdays, the team with the most points is declared „Champion” of the league; the Cup, an eliminatoriy competition, and, eventually, the Supercup, which is played between the winners of the Championship and of the Cup. The championship starts in November each year and finishes in May of the following year, with a so called „winter break” between December and March, when matches are not played due to the meteorologic conditions.

The competition is promoted through various marketing communication tools, such as advertising, public relations or direct marketing. At the beginning of the year 2011, the organizing team of *Liga Economistului* thought about staging an event, in

form of a gala, which was designed with the aim of marking the recommencing of the football in the league after the winter break.

A differentiation must be made. Both *Liga Economistului* and the gala are events. The former one is a sporting event, while the latter one is a marketing event. The marketing event is part of the marketing promotion mix of the sporting event, having the goal of increasing the brand awareness and sensitivity of the fans towards *Liga Economistului*. As with any other product or service, the gala organized by *Liga Economistului* was „tailored” according to the marketing mix: product, promotion, place and price. „Translating” the four P’s into action verbs, the following processes had to be done in order to stage the gala: production, promotion, distribution and pricing. Following the four P’s means using what Diller defined as „Eventmarketing”, that is a „systemic planing and staging of events or of other activities, according to the principles of marketing” (1992, p. 289).

According to theory, modern sport organizations have to develop integrated marketing communications. When pursuing a goal, sport organizations have to use different communicational tools in parallel. They have to build a so called „communicational mix”, because, as Popescu (2003) notes, communication is an important component of the marketing activity of any organization, thus of sport organizations too. Next to advertising or public relations, *Liga Economistului* integrated marketing events as one of its promotional tools. Thus, the gala represents a marketing event for *Liga Economistului*, but it also needs eventmarketing, in order to be planned, promoted, and consumed.

2.1. The concept of the event (Production stage)

Each marketing event needs a „production” stage, when organizers need to design the concept of the happenings. The ignition for organizing the gala was an idea of *Liga Economistului*’s top management. Still, an idea was too vague. A concept, which to give form to the idea, was needed in order to properly organize the event. As Schäfer-Mehdi (2008) points, a concept is a detailed sketch of the idea and a decisive element of the event, as the staging of the latter one begins from a concept. Moise (2002) presents the importance of a concept while correlating it to the visitors of the event. The author thinks that a failed event would mean a disruption between organizers and participants if not properly planned: participants at a failed event will no longer visit other events of the same organizer.

The success of an event is not influenced only by the idea, however good it may be, but, in a great proportion, also by planing. The elaboration of the gala’s concept began with a briefing held on the 13th of February 2011 between the managerial staff of *Liga Economistului*. The organizers met in an informal setting and discussed what had to be done between March and June 2011, in order to guarantee a proper, ascending development for the football championship. While talking about what promotional activities should be executed in order to draw more fans next to *Liga Economistului*, the person in charge of the Marketing Communications came up with the idea of a gala. After exploring the idea¹, the rest of the organizers supported it,

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having the belief that, if good organized, the event would add value to the stakeholders of *Liga Economistului*. Several reasons backed up the idea of staging a gala. The relaunch of the football championship was just the occasion, but the following arguments were speaking for the gala: better identification of *Liga Economistului* with its target market; increase of *Liga Economistului*'s brand value; and offering an unforgettable experience for the participants. These arguments had the capacity of creating extra-value for *Liga Economistului*. Moreover, the gala would not only be a good communicational tool, but also an opportunity to reward some of the main performers of the previous seasonⁱⁱ and to make the draws of the matches in the Cup competition. From the moment the idea of the event was expressed and shortly analyzed, the organizing team began thinking about a concept.

The mentioned staff meeting found place almost three weeks before the restart of the football season and the staging of the galaⁱⁱⁱ. The organizers had about sixteen days to plan a concept for the event. They began exchanging information and knowledge via telephone and e-mail. From the pieces of exchanged information, a concept was drawn in a Microsoft Word document, which was shared among the persons who were in charge of organizing the event^{iv}. An event has to be organized around some coordinates. The concept helped identifying and adapting those coordinates to the gala held by *Liga Economistului*:

- Target group. According to the Event Marketing literature, the writing of a concept should begin with a market research, in order to find out who would be the visitors of the event or which would be the best location. In the case of *Liga Economistului*'s gala, no such research was needed. Being an integrated event^v, the organizers of the gala had all the needed information from the football championship. The target groups of the football championship became also the target groups of the gala. The football players in *Liga Economistului* were students and professors of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, while the matches were followed by fans who, again, were mainly students, professors and members of the same academic community. So, these two categories of persons were also the main attenders who were expected for the gala;

- Occasion. The gala was planned with the occasion of reopening the 2010-2011 competition season of *Liga Economistului* after the winter break. This is the reason why the gala was set to take part with two days before the fourth matchday of the season, which also was the first one after the winter break;

- Period. As was later decided, the gala was going to find place on the 3rd of March, 2011, at six a clock in the evening;

- Place. As with the target groups, no research was needed for finding a location. This gala was the second marketing event that *Liga Economistului* was organizing. The previous one took place in the Room No. 2013 of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, and drew positive feedback from the public. The „research” information was actually gathered from the feedback that participants to the former event offered. Because those participants enjoyed the place, the organizers of the gala decided to keep the same place for this event as well. They received the help of the Academy, which offered the room for staging the event.

- Objectives. One of the main features of a concept is correctly and clearly identifying objectives for an event (Moise, 2002). A good identification of objectives facilitates the whole future production process of the event. Figure 1 presents some characteristics (Balaure, 2002, pp. 580-581) which made objectives be easier to follow by the organizers of the gala. The objectives of the gala were the following:
 - the awarding of prizes for the best three football teams of *Liga Economistului* 2009-2010's season, for the main goalscorer, for the best goalkeeper and for the most fair-play player;
 - drawing the matches for the quarterfinals stage of the Cup's competition, matches which were planned for the 12th of March 2011, nine days after the gala.
- Idea. The idea of the gala came from the top management of *Liga Economistului*.
- Budget. It has to be said that the gala was organized with low costs. Because the place of the event was a room in the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, no rental fees existed. Furthermore, the institution approved the printing of diplomas and other materials for free. From its own budget, *Liga Economistului* spent 200 Lei for catering.

2.2. Event Promotion

Targeted attendants rarely find out by themselves about an event. The ones who do, are, generally, close to the organizers. For informing the rest of the target public, the team that organizes the event has to use marketing communication tools.

Lot of scientific research was allocated especially to the promotion of events. Many of the papers analyze the promotion of sporting events (McCarville, Fllod, Froats, 1998; Kinney, McDaniel, 1996; Gardner, 1985; Scott, Zakus, Hill, 2008). Other authors try to be more general and present the implications of marketing promotions for whatever type of event (Jago et al., 2003). What is true for all kind of events, be they sporting or marketing ones, is that promotions play an important role. As Hoyle notes, „regardless of the nature of your event, its success will largely depend on promotion. Promotion is vital in creating awareness of the event, a desire to participate, and a feeling by the potential participant that the investment of time and money validates the benefits the event offers” (2002, p. 30).

Marketing promotions are used by event organizers in order to communicate as much as possible information about the upcoming event to the targeted attenders, to other stakeholders or to the public, in general. The promotional activity helps event organizers capture the attention of the public. Thus, information has to contain a message which has to have potential to attract attendance to the event. In the last twenty years, the promotional activity for events has enriched, as new communicational channels – such as e-mails or social networking websites – which allow event organizers to share information more rapidly and to a larger public, have appeared. If not necessary new communicational tools have emerged, older ones have been upgraded and offer now more possibilities to send messages to the public.

- ❖ **Acceptability:** the objectives answered the needs of the event's target groups. The football players who were going to attend the event were wanting to know which will be the quarterfinals of the Cup-competition, as they were also going to play in those matches. Otherwise told, they wanted to know which opponent they will have to face on the football field. Also, the players and the fans of Liga Economistului were expecting to find out who the best footballers of the previous season were, as they voted in a poll that had the goal to find the best goalkeeper, the most fair-play player, the best professor-footballer and the best student-footballer;
- ❖ **Flexibility:** as can be seen, only two goals have been set for the gala. Not just that having few objectives helped the organizers keep efforts focused (Stevens, p. 51), but it also allowed a high degree of flexibility. If something unexpected would have happened, these objectives could have been adapted to the situation. For example, if problems occurred, the organizers could have adapted the objectives to the situation by using the power of socialization: after all, almost all the people that turned up to the event knew each other from the football field, so they could have understood that unexpected situations occur and they could have offered their help in order to sort them out. Fortunately, nothing unexpected happened at Liga Economistului's gala;
- ❖ **Measurability:** it is important for each objective to state what exactly it is going to achieve in a determined period of time (Balaure, 2002, p. 580). Giving objectives a numerical dimension helped the organizers to easily conduct the gala. It was clear from the beginning that the objectives had to be fulfilled in the two hours that were awarded to Liga Economistului in order to stage its gala. Next, it was also known that seven diplomas were going to be awarded to the main protagonists of the 2009-2010 season, and that four matches had to be drawn for the quarterfinals of the Cup;
- ❖ **Motivating factor:** the participants at the gala had to be motivated to contribute at the fulfillment of the objectives. As it turned out, the participants were actively involved, mainly by offering precious feedback. All what the presenters of the gala did was to hand in the diplomas and to draw the matches, while the discussions around the awards and the draws of the matches were made by the attendants, who continuously exchanged opinions among them and with the organizers by stating their ideas loud and public, contributing to what may have been called an event where knowledge was openly shared;
- ❖ **Clarity:** the objectives had to be clearly understood by the organizers and by the participants. There was no problem in understanding the objectives, as all the people involved in the gala had experience in playing football in Liga Economistului, having gone through these types of events for several times already;
- ❖ **Compatibility:** each objective had to be part of what happened in Liga Economistului. Rewarding the best players of a season is already a tradition of the competition, so that this objective was called in order to keep this tradition alive. The other objective, drawing the quarterfinal matches, had to be fulfilled. There was no way out, because the matches in the Cup competition had to be played. If the teams wouldn't have been paired against each other, no matches would have been played. So, it was necessary to fulfill this objective, which indeed happened.

Figure 1. Characteristics of the objectives of the gala

The marketing communication process used for the gala was based on a multiple-step model proposed by Kotler and Keller (2008):

Step 1: Identifying the target audience

The first step had to be the identification of the target audience, as the audience influences the decisions of the sender regarding what, how, when, where, and to whom to communicate (Kotler, Keller, 2008, p. 797). The first step may be complex and difficult, but in the case of *Liga Economistului*, the identification process was facilitated by the fact that the target audience for the communicational campaign did not differ from the target audience of the gala, which, at its own, was the same as the target audience of the whole football league, as can be seen in Figure 2.

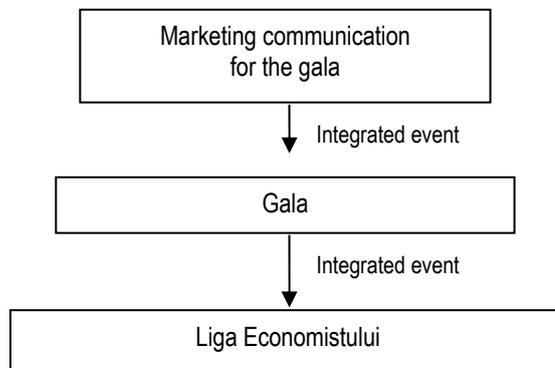


Figure 2. Integration of marketing communication in multiple events

The target audience of the marketing communication for the gala was formed by students, professors and members of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. Further on, the target audience was categorized depending on the fidelity degree (how high is the fidelity of the people in the target audience for *Liga Economistului*). It came out that the people with a high fidelity degree also had a high use rate (how often they attend matches and events organized by *Liga Economistului*). Two lists were formed: one containing the highly devoted fans (audience), the second one gathering the fans who were not as committed as the first ones, but who were still followers of the competition, or even not devoted at all. The lists are presented in Figure 3.

Devoted audience	Not devoted audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Footballers playing in the league • Close fans of the league/teams playing in the league 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other fans and stakeholders

Figure 3. Segmentation of the target audience depending on the fidelity degree

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The footballers playing in the league were regarded as devoted consumers because they were coming to play for their teams each Saturday when the games were scheduled. Similar to them is the behavior of some fans, who either attended a high amount of matches or who were eager followers of the competition's webpage, contributing with comments, posts or photos. Further on, the market segmentation based on the fidelity degree was combined with the segmentation based on the roles of the consumers: students, professors, members of the academic community, and foreigners^{vi}. The result is presented in Figure 4.

Target market 1	Target market 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC1: Footballers playing in the league SC2: (professors and students) • SC1: Close fans of the league/teams playing in the league SC2: (professors and students) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SC1: Other fans and stakeholders SC2: (professors, students, members of the academic community, foreigners)
<p>Legend: SC1=Segmentation criteria 1, based on the fidelity degree; SC2=Segmentation criteria 2, based on the roles of the consumers</p>	

Figure 4. Market Segmentation Criteria

After segmenting the audience, the decision was made that the marketing communication for the event was going to address the following audiences:

- Professors playing in *Liga Economistului*;
- Students playing in *Liga Economistului*;
- Professors who are close fans of *Liga Economistului*;
- Students who are close fans of *Liga Economistului*;
- Other fans and stakeholders.

The clear identification of the five target audiences helped the organizers of the gala to rationalize the marketing communication program, by preventing them from wasting time with communications that would have been addressed to people which would have probably not attended the gala. Moreover, segmentation was used because it would have been nearly impossible to reach each targeted guest with the same message. Identifying five groups of guests allowed the organizers to “tailor” different messages (one for each group or one for more groups at once), to find different channels for sending the messages and to integrate communications in various ways.

Step 2: Setting the objectives of the communication program

Objectives were set in order to direct the communication effort. Duncan (2004, p. 179) defines objectives as “what marketers want to accomplish with marketing communication”. Earlier in the paper, we have seen which the marketing objectives of the gala were. Now, we will concentrate upon the objectives of the communication campaign which was used in order to promote the gala. These latter objectives had to influence the attitude of the audience regarding the gala. Through attitude, Kotler and Keller (2008, p. 291) understand the “favorable or unfavorable aggregate of evaluations, sentiments and predispositions to action of a person towards an object or an idea”. First, promotion had to positively influence the evaluations and the sentiments of the target audience regarding *Liga Economistului*'s gala. In this first step, promotion had to inform and then remind targeted guests about the gala. Then, as could be read in the definition, an attitude also implies the predispositions to action of a person towards an idea. A good promotion would have ment not only to create a good perception of the event in the minds of the audience, but also to convince people to attend the gala.

Step 3: Projecting the communications

Communication objectives have to be supported by strategies. Duncan (2005, p. 184) defines strategies as “ideas about how to accomplish objectives”. Further on, strategies have to be based on tactics, which are “specific actions to be taken to execute a strategy” (Duncan, 2005, p. 184). According to Kotler and Keller (2008), a communication strategy has to be split in three components:

- a) The strategy of the message (what has to be said);
- b) The creative strategy (how has the message to be said)
- c) The source of the message (who will communicate the message).

a) The strategy of the message. When creating the message, marketers have to search for appealing information and ideas which to coincide with the positioning of the brand (Kotler, Keller, 2008). What the messages had to communicate about the event were:

- date
- time
- place
- purpose of the gala
- what was going to happen at the gala.

These were the most important points which had to be reached during the marketing communication, and they had to be stated in at least one of the messages that were going to be sent to the public. Overall, during the two weeks of communication, *Liga Economistului* was going to send three written messages.

b) The creative strategy. Through creative strategy, Kotler and Keller (2008) understand the way in which marketers transform their theoretic message in a practical communication. The messages for promoting the gala were created with own

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resources, by organizers of *Liga Economistului*, not with the help of a third party, such as an advertising company.

In the perspective of online marketing (which was going to be used), Vegheș (2003, p. 338) defines a message as “the combination of words (text), graphic elements, as well as image and audio elements, sent to the consumers with the purpose of informing, of influencing their beliefs and attitudes or of modifying their consumer behavior”. What the communication campaign for the gala tried was to influence the attitude of the receivers of the messages, so that to transform their consuming behavior from non-participation towards participation at the event.

The first message^{vii} (#1), shown in Figure 5, was integrated in a piece of news presenting the schedule of the football matches to be played until the rest of the 2010-2011 season of *Liga Economistului*. In the piece of news, posted on the official website of *Liga Economistului*, the following statement was made:

We will declare opened the second half of the season a day earlier at a ceremony at which you are invited and where we will reward the best of the best from the last season. Details will be announced later.

Figure 5. Message #1

This first message was not clear. It just announced that there will be a ceremony. This message was sent when the idea of the gala was just an intention of the organizers of *Liga Economistului*. No discussions about the room, the date and the hour were held. Though, the organizers wanted to post a message, being confident that the event will find place. If not finding the desired room for hosting the gala, the organizers had a backup: another room which they had already secured.

Liga Economistului returns with the fifth matchday, Saturday, the 5th of March, at the playground behind the Belvedere student hostels, starting with 10 a.m.
Two days earlier, on the 3rd of March [date], the official opening of the competition for the year 2011 [purpose] will take place in the Room 2013 of the Virgil Madgearu building, on Calea Dorobanți Street [place]. The event will start at 6 p.m. [starting time]. Also then, the best players and the best teams of the 2009-2010 season will be rewarded [happening on the agenda], and the draw for the quarterfinal matches for the quarterfinals of *Cupa Economistului* will be held [happening on the agenda]. Please confirm your participation at the e-mail adress: ligaeconomistului@yahoo.com [confirmation of participation].
Looking forward to seeing you! [encouraging message]

Figure 6. Message #2

The next day, negotiations for booking the desired No. 2013 room in the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies were started. The room was available

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Thursday, the 3rd of March, 2011, between 6 and 8 p.m. In the same day these coordinates were made clear, a second message (#2), analyzed in Figure 6, was posted on the website. The message contained a photo and text. The photo was the official poster of the football league, inscribed with the message “Liga returns... on March, 5th”.

In what concerns the text, the first part of the message announces the restart of the football championship, setting the context for holding the gala. The announcement of the gala actually starts with the second phrase in the text, when the date and the purpose of the gala are presented. The starting hour is further given, and the message continues with the presentation of the happenings which will be on the event’s agenda: rewarding the players and drawing the quarterfinals. Then, readers are asked to confirm their participation. The message ends with a statement that encourages consumers reached by the message to participate in the gala.

Note that neither the first, nor the second message, address to a particular target group. Both messages have a general character, being sent to the mass public. The third message (#3), presented in Figure 7, was planned to be sent by e-mail. It was the first message that addressed a target group: the football players in *Liga Economistului*.

Dear players [Target group]

Liga Economistului will mark the reopening of the competition [occasion] by a gala [type of event] which will be held Thursday, March 3rd, 2010, at 6 a.m., in Room 2013 of the Virgil Madgearu building on Calea Dorobanti Street [date, place]. During the event, the best players and the best teams in the 2009 – 2010 season will be rewarded. At the same time, the draw for the quarter-finals of the cup competition will be held [happenings in the event].

The organizers of *Liga Economistului* ask the representatives of the teams to send an e-mail in which to confirm participation, by also stating the number of players from their teams who will be present [confirmation of participation through RSVP].

Attached you will find a document with the nominees for each category which will be awarded a prize. For more details you can contact A. P. (07XX XXX XXX) or I. P. (07XX XXX XXX)* [readers are informed that they can find out more details; contact persons are provided].

You're welcome!

With love,
Liga Economistului Organizing Team [Signature]

* Names and contacts of the organizers have been kept secret for this research. Just the initials of the names are real.

Figure 7. Message #3

c) *The source of the message.* The source of the messages was *Liga Economistului*, the body organizing the gala. The parenting of the gala was not the only reason why *Liga Economistului* was chosen as sender of the messages. Because it is a popular brand among the target audiences identified in Step 1, *Liga Economistului*

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had the capacity to achieve a high degree of capturing the attention of the audience, and also to anchor the facts regarding the gala (date, hour, place etc.) in the minds of consumers.

Step 4: Choosing the marketing communication channels

Both personal and non-personal communication channels were used for promoting the gala. The tool used through the personal channel was word of mouth marketing, while the non-personal channel was based, mainly, on Internet. For many persons, Internet is an entertaining solution to spend free time. For sport marketers, Internet is a communicational support with huge potential. Next to the playground, which is the physical space where *Liga Economistului* and its fans meet, Internet is their virtual meeting point. The digitalization of sporting events or organizations has the potential to increase awareness and attract new fans. As Bird (2007) notes, people don't surf the world wide web in order to receive advertising, but 92% of them are searching for information. Since spring 2009, the *Liga Economistului* football championship had a webpage which was continuously updated with the latest news. Being an event under the patronage of *Liga Economistului*, the gala was a news, so that information concerning it was posted on the website. It was not just any type of information, but promotional information. In this way, marketing communication had a "hidden" character. As it was not advertising, followers of the site did not perceive the posted announces regarding the gala as promotional messages, but as simple pieces of news. Actually, posted information was both news and marketing communication.

On the Internet, interaction between *Liga Economistului* and fans is a matter of seconds. Bird (2007) considers Internet to be the fastest developing new communicational tool of all there exist, attributing three benefits to it: easiness, cheapness and rapidity. Indeed, these benefits helped *Liga Economistului* communicate for its gala:

- easiness: each of the five persons who organized the gala had access to the webpage of *Liga Economistului*. Editing and posting information on the webpage was also easy, thanks to the user-friendly platform offered by Wordpress;
- cheapness: no extra expenses were caused by the use of the webpage for communicational purposes;
- rapidity: on the webpage, a message can be posted immediately after being edited. New information was available for the followers of *Liga Economistului*'s website in almost real time. The facility and speed of the Internet helped *Liga Economistului* send a reminding message in the morning of the gala.

Other features of the Internet noted during the communication campaign were:

- the possibility to create complex messages, integrating text, photo and colour;
- one single message reached more persons at once;
- a great amount of information was sent within one message.

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Step 5: Budgeting

No budget was used, as most communication was done online. The expenses of the phone talks used for telemarketing were covered by the persons who made the phone calls. Taking into consideration that each person who did telemarketing for the gala called his or her network of friends, the phone calls were seen as having not only the purpose of inviting people to the gala, but also as usual chats with friends, with the invitation being launched during the chat. As for the marketers, they were not paid, as they did voluntary work.

Steps 6 and 7: Choosing the marketing communications mix and Measuring the results of communication

Because there are many promotional posters posted on the notice boards in the Academy, the organizers of *Liga Economistului* have decided that posters wouldn't have brought much image capital to the gala, as they would have barely been considered by the public in the mass of other advertisements.

The gala was promoted exclusively via Word of Mouth, Direct Marketing or Online Marketing.

The Word of Mouth Marketing was done by the managers of *Liga Economistului*. They spoke to the players and fans each of them knew, and invited them to the event. This tool was efficient and convincing, as the inviting and the invited persons already knew themselves. It was a message sent from one friend to another: the friendship and the shared interest in *Liga Economistului* were the main advantages of this tool. After deciding that Internet was going to be used as the main communicational channel for promoting the gala, the organizers had to choose the specific online marketing instruments that they would use in order to reach their goals. The online marketing plan included the official webpage of *Liga Economistului* (www.ligaeconomistului.com), the official Facebook profile of the same competition, and direct e-mailing.

The website of *Liga Economistului* was used to send messages #1 and #2. The hyperlinks where the messages were posted was copied and distributed via Facebook, from where the fans connected with *Liga Economistului*'s profile could directly access the Internet page. Message #3, targeting the footballers playing in the competition, was sent through e-mail. A fourth and final message was sent exclusively via Facebook, in the morning of March 3rd, having a reminder role. An evidence of the messages sent can be seen in Figure 8, which, for each message, presents the channels and the instruments used, the targeted audience, the date when the message was sent, the role and the content of the message, as well as the numbers of views. Telemarketing was done by organizers of the event, who phoned the targeted guests and invited them to the gala.

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Message	Channels used	Communica-tional instruments	Target groups	Date when message was sent (in the year 2011)	Role of the message	Content	Number of views
Message 1	Non-personal	Website	Mass public	22 nd of February	Informative	Text + image	375
Message 2	Non-personal	Website, Facebook	Mass public	23 rd of February	Informative	Text + image	299
Message 3	Non-personal	E-mail	Players in Liga Economistului	24 th of February	Reminding, informative for players who did not see the messages on the website	Text	20 invitations
Message 4	Non-personal	Facebook	Mass public	3 rd of march	Reminding	Text	930
Word of Mouth	Personal	Face-to-face meetings	Professors playing in Liga Economistului; Students playing in Liga Economistului; Professors who are close fans of Liga Economistului; Students who are close fans of Liga Economistului	23 rd of February-1 st March	Informative	Verbal	-

Figure 8. Evidence of the promotional messages

A final step of the promotional campaign was measuring the results of the activities. As can be seen in Figure 8, the messages sent via non-personal channels were viewed for at least 299 times, while the highest penetration (930 views) was obtained by message #4. Then, about 40 guests showed up at the event, which was around the same number of guests the organizers were expecting.

2.3. The scenario and the gala

After being promoted, the gala was finally staged, according to the plan. The guests started to arrive by a quarter to six, and they were welcomed by the moderator of the gala. As the room was booked for another event which ended just ten minutes before the event of *Liga Economistului*, the moderator entertained the guests with small-talks, while the other organizers were arranging the food and beverages that were brought as catering. Then, at six a clock in the evening, the event started, according to the scenario which was thought in advance by the organizers. According to the theory, a scenario plans how the concept will be transformed into reality and offered to the attenders (Schäfer-Mehdi, 2008). The scenario can also be seen as the plan of how to send the idea or the planned information to the public, in limited

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amounts of time and space. In order to play the scenario, the gala needed variables such as architecture, people, language, technic support, lights and catering:

a) Architecture. The following chronological steps formed the architecture which was used in the gala:

- 1) Greeting of the moderator;
- 2) Moderator presented the objectives of the event;
- 3) Moderator announced the award of prizes;
- 4) Awarding of prizes was started, with each football player who was receiving a diploma coming in front of the room to take his prize and to say some words. From the moment when a player was invited to receive his diploma up to the moment when he went back to his place, a picture of the respective player was projected onto the screen which was placed in front of the room;

- 5) Speaker announced the end of the first objective of the meeting and the start of the second one: drawing the matches for the quarterfinals;

- 6) Speaker announced how the teams were going to be paired for the quarterfinals;

- 7) Draws were made. After the schedule was completed, the speaker invited the representatives of the teams to tell their opinions about the games;

- 8) Speaker announced the end of the gala and invited the guests to stay for a small-talk;

b) People. Although there have been five organizers, just three of them staged the event: one moderated the gala, while the other two assisted him with technical support;

c) Language. An important part of the event was completed through verbal communication. The chosen language was Romanian, as this was the mother tongue of all the participants;

d) Technical support. A PowerPoint Show was prepared for the event. On each slide, next to the text or to the pictures, the logo's of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies and of *Liga Economistului* were displayed. The software which was used in order to assist the draws of the quarterfinals was incorporated into the slides. As one team was being extracted, one of the moderator's assistants was typing the name of the team into the software, and the name was shown on the slides. The last two slides of the PowerPoint Show also had important roles. One of them presented the logo's of the competition's sponsors, while the last one included a „Thank You” note for the willingness of the guests to participate to the event;

e) Lights. The lights were adjusted so that they did not negatively influence the quality and the clearness of the PowerPoint slides. At the end of the presentation, when the small-talk began, all the lights were turned on;

f) Catering. As already mentioned, catering was used in this event, being part of the small-talk round. The guests stood up and began moving into the room to talk to each other, while also enjoying biscuits, cakes and juice. The catering had a simple and informal character.

3. Marketing outcomes of the gala

As was written in the first part of the paper, three arguments spoke for staging a gala: better identification with the target market, increase of brand value, and an unforgettable experience for the participants:

1) Better identification of Liga Economistului with its target markets (Relationship marketing)

In general, football fans have high expectations. They want to see their beloved team winning or they want to see high quality matches in a competition. *Liga Economistului* has to face even higher expectations: the players in the championship expect the organizers to offer them a well-developed framework, which to allow them to play proper football. *Liga Economistului* offers a service (the possibility to play football) and has to satisfy its stakeholders. The football players who participate at the competition and the fans of the teams represent the main target-consumers of *Liga Economistului*. The gala was an opportunity to bring these target-consumers closer to *Liga Economistului*, an organization which faces a problem also met at many other organizations in our days: the high noise of marketing communication. There are thirteen student organizations in the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, each of them promoting its activities and events mainly through the same communicational tools: advertising (posters and flyers), viral marketing (e-mails), online marketing (website) and word-of-mouth. *Liga Economistului* also uses these mass-communication tools, otherwise it would lose important market share. But it also uses event marketing, because:

- It offers a more personal approach to the fans. The focus is on the individual, not on the masses;
- It helps *Liga Economistului* make itself „heard” on a market with intensive competition, characterized by information overload and saturation.

When mass-advertising for the football matches, *Liga Economistului* communicates to the fans, but it is the brand of the competition which achieves attention. Now, the event set the main focus on the players and on the fans, bringing them together and offering them the possibility to build unforgettable memories, which, indirectly, will place the brand of *Liga Economistului* on a high spot in the perceptions and feelings of the participants. The gala offered the possibility to concentrate on the individual. The participants at the event were in the spotlight of all what *Liga Economistului* ment for two hours in the evening of the 3rd of March, 2011. The gala facilitated the dialogue between players, fans, and organizers of *Liga Economistului*. The participants were actively involved, and the „drama” of the night rose, leading to a „launch” of emotions into the room.

Relationship marketing encourages organizations to continuously keep contact with its stakeholders (Pop, 2006; Pop, Pelău, 2006). Relationship marketing is an integral part of *Liga Economistului*'s marketing strategy, the gala being one of the proofs. Events are an important part of *Liga Economistului*'s relationship marketing, because they strengthen the relationship between the brand of the competition and its

players and fans. This happens, as Nickel notes, through the capacity of events to wake up the emotions of the participants (Nickel, 1996). These emotions lead to positive associations between brand and participants.

II) Increase of brand value through the event

Kotler and Keller (2008) define brand capital as the added value that products or services gain by using a brand. Brand capital, an intangible asset, is important for *Liga Economistului* as it may influence the position of fans towards this competition. A positive perception about the brand capital may mean a closer approach of the fan to *Liga Economistului*, while a negative impression may distance the fan from the organization. A fan associates thoughts, feelings, images or experiences to the brand (Kotler, Keller, 2008), their mix resulting in how well or how bad the fan knows that brand. The knowledge of the brand is reflected in brand awareness. A high brand awareness means a more loyal fan. Thus, one of the marketing goals of *Liga Economistului* is to improve brand awareness, because this will influence fan behaviour in a positive way. For improving brand awareness, *Liga Economistului* can use many marketing tools, one of them being events. Events are characterized by the fact that they easily transmit feelings and experiences to the fans, who will associate them with the brand. Improving brand awareness is important for *Liga Economistului*, as the value of the brand lies not within the sporting organization, but in the minds of its fans.

The gala helped *Liga Economistului* improve its brand capital. The organizers integrated the brand in the course of the event, presenting it both verbal and graphical, as can be seen in Figure 9.

Through the event, *Liga Economistului* tried to position its brand in the thoughts of the participants as:

a) Friendly. What happened at the gala can be characterized in the following way: football players and fans, all of them knowing each other well from the field, met on an evening and spent good quality time together. There was a friendly atmosphere that gave important stakeholders of *Liga Economistului* the possibility to rejoin for a couple of hours and discuss matters regarding the football teams and the competition they all played in or supported. *Liga Economistului* based its marketing on the people's belief that associations are more powerful and productive than individual behavior (Ignat, 2011a; Ignat, 2011b).

b) Supportive. During the gala, the speaker – who was also one of the referees and the organizers of the competition – told the participants that he is open to listening their needs, desires, problems or suggestions, which indeed happened. At the end of the presentation, when the small-talk began, football players spoke to the host of the gala about their personal thoughts which concerned the football league they were playing in. The speaker took the thoughts into consideration and promised to solve or implement those which were feasible, which later during that season happened. By offering the participants the possibility to speak to him, the organizer of *Liga Economistului* let the players and the fans know that he was supporting their ideas, and that they could always look for help among the organizers in whatever problems they had related to *Liga Economistului*. In this way, *Liga Economistului* proved to be aware of its stakeholders' needs.

Verbal integration	Graphical integration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The speaker of the gala welcomed the participants by reminding them that they were attending an event organized by <i>Liga Economistului</i> • Before handing in the diplomas, the speaker announced that <i>Liga Economistului</i> was ready to reward its best players and teams of the previous season • Before drawing the matches for the quarterfinals, the speaker reminded that the cup-competition was organized under the patronage of <i>Liga Economistului</i> • All the comments of the participants and their dialogue at the small-talk were related to the football played in <i>Liga Economistului</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The logo of <i>Liga Economistului</i> was placed on the diplomas awarded to players • The logo of <i>Liga Economistului</i> was placed on the PowerPoint slides which were projected on a screen in front of the attendees during the entire gala

Figure 9. Verbal and graphical integration of the Liga Economistului brand during the gala

c) *Aware of performance.* *Liga Economistului* is aware not just of its stakeholders' needs, but also about their merits. By rewarding the best footballers and teams of the previous season, *Liga Economistului* showed that it is a brand which acknowledges and rewards the best performers, and that it aspires for a higher quality.

III) *Offering an unforgettable experience for the participants*

In the last twenty years, experience began to play an important role in marketing. Experiential marketing combines emotions and rational thought and connects the output with the guests of an event. The combination had to transform the simple attendance at the event in an unforgettable experience, and also to establish such a relationship with the guests that they do not easily forget that evening.

One of the factors that helped creating the experience was comfort (Marconi, 2005). Being members of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, the attendees

of the event found it comfortable that the gala was staged in a room which was part of the Academy, as the location was well known to them, and they did not lose time with finding it.

Creating the experience was facilitated by the common passion the guests and the organizers of the gala had, namely football. As a matter of fact, they were all representing the same competition, and participating players wanted to find out the latest news, as these would have had influence on their teams. For example, many guests attended the gala because they wanted to find out by themselves which opponent their team would face into the quarterfinals. In order to create the experience, the moderator activated the senses of the participants, by inviting them to say what they thought about the opponents their teams had to face in the quarterfinals or what they thought about the matches of the upcoming Saturday. There were the emotions linked with receiving the rewards, followed by the mystery of the draws. Then, participants did not only stand still, but they interacted with each other, engaging in interesting conversations. The individuals, not the masses, were the main actors in this communication.

In the end, the guests had a good time at the gala, their satisfaction being proved by two indicators: once, they congratulated the organizers for the idea of having such an event, and, second, they promised to give a hand of help in organizing the football league over the long run.

4. Conclusions

This research has shown that, next to the widely used promotional tools, such as advertising or public relations, sporting organizations can also integrate events in their communicational mix. These marketing events do not have to be confused with sporting events, which are the main activity of the sporting organizations. Instead, marketing events have to be understood as a promotional tool for sporting events.

Liga Economistului promoted its football championship by staging a gala. After having the idea, a concept was drawn, which was followed by the promotion of the gala, done through instruments of the marketing communications mix, and, finally, the event was staged and consumed by the guests. The paper demonstrated how, in the case of *Liga Economistului*, a marketing event helped the organization better identify with its target markets, increase its brand value, and offer an unforgettable experience for the participants.

However, the case study has its limitations. One would be the lack of quantitative results, which to confirm or to infirm the quality of both the marketing promotion for the event, and of the organization of the event itself. Given the small sample of guests, a qualitative research was chosen. A second limitation is that the research presents only short-term effects of the gala. It would have been interesting to trace the evolution of the relationship marketing with the guests of the event over the long run, and to analyze how the participation at the gala influenced their perception of *Liga Economistului*'s brand, as well as their position to the competition.

The two limitations could be taken into account for further research, within papers which to present how exactly marketing an organization through events modifies the demand for sports consumption, while other investigations could focus on clarifying more precisely the differences between „marketingevents” and „eventmarketing”. The event presented in this study did not need no budget, thus finances were kept out of question. An interesting idea would be a research which to provide the financing part of a marketing event, and which to correlate the marketing expenditures with the eventual earnings or losses.

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Notes

ⁱ Brief discussion about what seemed to be in favor of the idea and what not.

ⁱⁱ Rewarding the main performers is a gesture of gratitude for the players and the teams which have realized outstanding sporting performances in the previous season. It is a way of thanking the main performers for their contribution to the capital Liga Economistului.

ⁱⁱⁱ The meeting was held on the 13th of February 2011, while the restart of the championship was fixed for the 5th of March 2011.

^{iv} In fact, the same persons who were also in charge of organizing the football championship.

^v The gala was part of the whole sporting event which is entitled Liga Economistului.

^{vi} Through foreigners, we understand fans or stakeholders who are not members of the academic community in ASE Bucharest.

^{vii} The messages were formulated in Romanian. In the purpose of this research, the messages were translated into English.