



# A Study on the Characteristics of the Summer Olympic Games Mascots

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study began with an interest in the meaning and importance of Olympic mascots, and this paper aimed to analyze the types and features of mascots by comparing the Summer Olympics mascots from Munich 1972 to Tokyo 2020 and ultimately to understand the attributes of the Summer Olympic mascots. **Research design, data, and methodology:** The approach of this study is the exploratory approach by literature reviews. This study carried out exploratory research on thinking about understanding the characteristics of the Summer Olympic Games Mascots. **Results:** First, the Munich 1972 mascot, Waldi is known as the first official mascot. Second, many mascots are designed the most in animal form. But the process of change according to the material of the Olympic mascot changed from a simple animal form to a finely expressed hybrid mascot, and multiple mascots appeared in the 2000s. **Conclusions:** The Olympic mascot is a representative symbol of the Olympic Games, representing the identity of the host country. Five attributes of the Olympic mascots were identified: friendliness, a symbolic meaning, originality, diversity, and value. Further implications were discussed.

**Keywords:** Host Country, Olympic Mascot, Summer Olympic Games, Waldi

**JEL Classification Code:** L83, M30, Z29

## 1. Introduction

The modern Olympic Games are the leading international sporting events featuring summer and winter sports competitions in which thousands of athletes from around the world participate in a variety of competitions. The modern Olympics, which began with the participation of several countries in Athens, Greece, provide an opportunity to identify the diversity of the cultures of the global community and the characteristics of the other cultures through sports (Kim & Lee, 2020). The Olympics are major global events, which attract huge worldwide interest, from people of all races, ages, and social positions (Pop, 2013). Historically, the Olympics were inspired by the ancient Olympic Games held in Olympia, Greece, from 776 BC to 393 AD, and the first Olympic Games, also known as the Games of the Olympiad were held in Athens in 1896 (Chang, Kim, & Lee, 2020). Under the policy of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to separate winter sports, the Olympic Games were divided into the 1924 Summer Olympics and the Winter Olympics. The Winter Olympic Games were held in Chamonix, France and later developed into an international sports event held on snow and ice every four years (Lee, 2018).

In today's Olympic Games, symbols representing the identity of the host country and city have been created and used to promote and succeed in each Olympics, and brand designs such as mascot, emblem, and slogan are included in the main examples. In particular, the Olympic mascot attracts the most attention from people around the world. The Olympic mascots have emerged as one of the means to make Olympic events more pronounced. Although it was an unofficial example, the first Olympic mascot was born in 1968 at the Grenoble Olympics and was called 'Shuss', meaning a little man on skis (Yang & Kim, 2019). But the first official Olympic mascot was 'Waldi' the dachshund at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. Since then, mascots have been used as a major tool for Olympic brand marketing (Han, 2016). The mascots are tasked with giving concrete form to the Olympic spirit and

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spreading the Olympic values, promoting the history and culture of the host country and city, and giving the event a festive atmosphere. In addition to the original functions of the Olympic mascots, the mascots also contain the philosophy and ideology of the host country and city, and the direction of global peace and environmental protection pursued worldwide.

This study began with an interest in the meaning and importance of Olympic mascots created so far, and from this point of view, it can be said that the official 13 Summer Olympics and 13 Winter Olympics mascots are the subjects of the study. However, for the efficient progress of the study, the approach of the study was subdivided into the mascots of the Summer and Winter Olympics. This is because the Olympics are largely dependent on the characteristics of seasonal sports events and geographic ventures. Therefore, this study was conducted as the first step in dealing with the mascots of the Summer Olympics. This paper aimed to analyze the types and features of mascots by comparing the Summer Olympics mascots from Munich 1972 to Tokyo 2020 and ultimately to understand the attributes of the Summer Olympic mascots.

## **2. Literature Review**

In the literature review section, the origin and development of the mascot and the definition and function of the Olympic mascots will be introduced.

### **2.1. The origin and development of the mascot**

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, mascots are people, animals, or objects that a certain group adopts as a symbol for their good influence. The mascot can also be a tool to communicate the values of a brand, city, and event to consumers. (Mahatmi & Satyagraha, 2020). Historically, almost all ethnic and tribal groups have had something like their own mascots, even though it wasn't called a mascot. A totem, which is defined as "an animal, plant, or natural object (or representation of an object) that serves as the emblem of a clan or family among a tribal or traditional people", can be considered the origin of the mascot (Clemence & Chimininge, 2015). From a similar point of view, a mascot is not necessarily targeted only at living humans and animals, and it ranges from plants to inanimate objects to various colors.

The word 'mascot' is derived from the Provençal and appeared in French dictionaries at the end of the 19th century. The word was popularized by a French composer Edmond Audran who wrote a comic operetta 'La mascotte', performed in December 1880. This operetta was so popular that it was translated into English as 'The Mascot', a word for any animal, person, or object that brings good luck (The Olympic Studies Centre, 2019a). To understand the concept of mascot more accurately, it is necessary to distinguish differences between symbols or characters as similar. Mascots mainly have specific objects such as animals and plants, while symbols mainly embody abstract concepts such as symbols, letters, and picture letters. Character is defined as "a symbol that contains strong individuality in its name, personality, and behavior to attract interest, and is worth commercialization." Mascots and characters differ in the dictionary sense, but if they both have visually identifiable shapes, they are used in the same sense.

Today the definition of mascots has been extended from the classical concepts of the past and is widely applied in the fields of business administration and brand design (Mahatmi & Satyagraha, 2020). The mascot serves as a meeting point for communication relationships between producers and consumers (Lury, 2004). From the perspective of brand design, the mascot is a representation of a brand where the mascot serves as a bridge between the brand and the consumer (Mahatmi & Satyagraha, 2020). For a mascot to function properly as a brand value carrier, mascot characters need to be assigned values and traits that can be identified by the target audience (Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011).

Mascots are effective marketing tools to promote the purpose and goals of businesses, public organizations, and various events. Mascots' brand elements help people to better remember the company and the product (Yadav, Bisoyi, & Chakrabarti, 2017). The characters of mascots have an impact on the brand and corporate identity (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004). Mascots are a popular way of promoting brands, and Olympic mascots are representative examples of collective public mascots.

### **2.2. The definition and Appearance of the Olympic mascots**

The representative symbols of the Olympics include the Olympic flag, slogan, emblem, mascot, and medals. In particular, an Olympic mascot is an object that symbolizes the host country and games (competitions) and is selected by the Organizing Committee along with the Olympic emblem and used for self-promotion and

commercial purposes so that it can be loved by the people of the host country as well as the people of the world. Because the Olympic emblem itself is symbolic, including authority and dignity, and has a rigidity that is not easily accessible to the public, the Olympic mascot has emerged for a different purpose than the emblem.

The Olympic mascot is a lucky symbol to promote the hosting and success of the Olympic Games to the world and includes various forms of visual elements to gain popularity during the Olympics (Lee, 2018). The Olympic mascot was first introduced at the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble, France, as an unofficial mascot called ‘Shuss’ to secure funding for the Olympics. Shuss has a red face and a smile, five rings of the Olympics on his head, and a ski downhill appearance. (Horne, 2014).




The official mascot was a multi-colored dachshund called ‘Waldi’ at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. Many Olympic mascots, like Wadi, are often made in the form of personification of animals because the active image of animals matches the characteristics of the Olympics (Lee, 2018). Since then, mascots have become the most popular and memorable ambassadors of the Olympic Games. An original creation, the mascot has the job of giving concrete form to the Olympic spirit, spreading the values highlighted at each edition of the Games, and giving them a festive atmosphere, while promoting the history and culture of the host city (The Olympic Studies Centre, 2019b).





These days mascots have appeared at each Olympics, and mascots have become an important part of the Olympic brand. The games mascots of each Olympics over the years have all been examples of ingenuity, imagination, and artistic creativity. They have come in many shapes and sizes, though they all convey the theme of the Olympic Games, and showcase the distinctive geographical features, history, and culture of the host city. They’re tasked with giving concrete form to the Olympic spirit, spreading the values highlighted at each edition of the games, promoting the history and culture of the host city, and giving the event a festive atmosphere.

### 3. Types and Features of Mascots at the Summer Olympics

Starting with Waldi at the 1972 Munich Olympics, a total of 20 types of mascots have been developed for the Olympic mascots, including Amik (Montreal 1976), Misha (Moscow 1980), Sam (LA 1984), Hodori (Seoul 1988), Cobi (Barcelona 1992), Lzzy (Atlanta 1996), Sid, Olly, and Millie (Sydney 2000), Phevos and Athena (Athens 2004), Beidei, Jingjing, Huanhua, Yingying, and Nini (Beijing 2008), Wenlock (London 2012), Vinicius (Rio de Janeiro 2016), and Miraitowa (Tokyo 2020). The Olympic mascots were divided into three periods to identify the types and characteristics of each mascot. The three periods are divided into the first (from Munich 1972 to Atlanta 1996), the second (from Sydney 2000 to Beijing 2008), and the third (from London 2012 to Tokyo 2020). The types and features of the mascots of the Summer Olympics from 1972 to 2012 are shown in Table 1. All mascots of this period were made of one mascot, not plural. In addition, six mascots, except for Izzy of Atlanta 1996, have utilized the representative animals of the host country, and have characterized not only the colors of the Olympics, but also the myths, traditions, and cultures of each region. Izzy was the first example of a unique and unusual mascot, as it was not created based on the motif of an animal or humanized animal.

**Table 1.** Olympic Mascots from Munich 1972 to Atlanta 1996



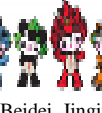
Game	Name	Types and Features
Munich 1972	 Waldi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wadi was the first official mascot of the Olympic Summer Games.</li> <li>- He is an animal (a dachshund in Bavaria), famed for its endurance, tenacity, and agility</li> <li>- The mascot features several different colors (with a striped body featuring three of the six Olympic colors: blue, yellow, and green)</li> </ul>
Montreal 1976	 Amik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amik means beaver in Algonquin (language among the North American Indians in Canada)</li> <li>- He appears with a red strip featuring the emblem of the Montreal 1976, which symbolizes the ribbon traditionally used for the winners’ medals.</li> </ul>
Moscow 1980	 Misha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The bear is a familiar animal in Russia, appearing in many popular stories, songs, and poems.</li> <li>- Misha means a striped belt around his waist made up of five bands in the colors of the Olympic rings</li> </ul>

LA 1984	 Sam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sam looks friendly and cheerful in order not to frighten children and to embody the optimism of the Olympic spirit.</li> <li>- He shows that he is part of American culture, with his hat featuring the design of the national flag.</li> </ul>
Seoul 1988	 Hodori	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The tiger appears frequently in Korean popular art and legends. With a positive image, it is associated with humor, bravery, and nobility.</li> <li>- Hodori wears the Olympic rings around his neck. On his head is a traditional Korean hat, the Sangmo. The ribbon on the hat is in the shape of an S for Seoul.</li> </ul>
Barcelona 1992	 Cobi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cobi is a humanized Pyrenean Mountain dog. The name was chosen because it is simple and easy to pronounce in most languages.</li> <li>- The mascot features his expression and three spiky hairs. Reactions to Cobi were mixed when he was first presented, but he grew in popularity during the months leading up to the Games, and ultimately proved a huge success.</li> </ul>
Atlanta 1996	 Izzy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Izzy is an unusual mascot in that he is not an animal, nor a human figure, nor an object.</li> <li>- He is blue and wears training shoes. The five Olympic rings are in various places around his body.</li> </ul>

Resource: The Olympic Studies Centre (2019a).

The types and features of the mascots of the Summer Olympics from 2000 to 2008 are shown in Table 2. The mascots of this period were all made in plural forms. The three mascots of Sydney 2000 represented Australia's nature-based animals in the southern hemisphere and emphasized the importance of protecting animal groups as a means of hosting the Olympics. Phevos and Athena, the two mascots of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games represented the Greek mythological god Apollo and goddess Athena, placing importance on the role of the link between the ancient and modern Olympics. The five mascots of the Beijing 2008 Olympics represented the color of one of the five Olympic rings.




**Table 2.** Olympic Mascots from Sydney 2000 to Beijing 2008

Game	Name	Types and Features
Sydney 2000	 Syd, Olly, and Millie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Syd is a reference to Sydney, Olly to Olympic, and Millie to the new millennium.</li> <li>- The three mascots are a duck-billed platypus (Syd), a kookaburra (Olly), and an echidna or spiny anteater (Millie). They symbolize water, air, and earth respectively. Their colors correspond to those of the Games emblem, and all three are typical examples of Australian fauna.</li> </ul>
Athens 2004	 Phevos and Athena	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Phevos and Athena are brother and sister.</li> <li>- They owe their strange shape to a typical terracotta doll in the shape of a bell from the 7th century BC. They symbolize the pleasure of playing and the values of Olympism.</li> <li>- Phoebos is another name for Apollo, the god of light and music; Athena is the goddess of wisdom and protector of the city of Athens. The two mascots thus symbolize the link between Ancient Greece and the Olympic Games of the modern era.</li> </ul>
Beijing 2008	 Beidei, Jingjing, Huanhuan, Yingying, and Nini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The mascots correspond to the five natural elements and, apart from Huanhuan, to four popular animals in China. Each mascot represents the color of one of the five Olympic rings.</li> <li>- Beibei, the fish is a reference to the element of water. She is blue and her wish is prosperity.</li> <li>- Jingjing, the panda represents the forest. He is black and his wish is happiness.</li> <li>- Huanhuan is a child of fire. He is red and transmits the passion of sport as well as symbolizes the Olympic flame and spirit.</li> <li>- Yingying, the Tibetan antelope, represents earth. He is yellow and his wish is good health.</li> <li>- Nini, the swallow, represents the sky. She is green and her wish is good luck.</li> </ul>

Resource: The Olympic Studies Centre (2019a).

The types and features of the mascots of the Summer Olympics from 2012 to 2020 are shown in Table 3. Unlike the previous period, the mascots of this period were expressed as a single mascot. The London 2012 mascot, Wenlock was inspired by Much Wenlock in Shropshire, England, where in 1850 the Wenlock Olympian Society held its first Olympian Games, regarded as an inspiration for the modern Olympic games. The five rings on his wrists matched the five Olympic rings, and the three points on his head symbolized the three places on the podium. The 2016 Rio Olympic mascot, Vinicius was composed of three animals, so one time to convey three ideas. He was made of Brazilian wildlife, combining the agility of cats, the sway of monkeys and grace of birds. As the most recent mascot, Miraitowa was named after the Japanese words for 'future' and 'eternity'.

**Table 3.** Olympic Mascots from London 2012 to Tokyo 2020

Game	Name	Types and Features
London 2012	 Wenlock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wenlock takes his name from the town of Much Wenlock in Shropshire, which still hosts the traditional Much Wenlock Games.</li> <li>- His metallic look is explained by the fact that he was made from one of the last drops of steel used to build the Olympic Stadium in London.</li> <li>- His eye is the lens of a camera, filming everything he sees. On his wrists, he wears five bracelets in the colors of the Olympic rings. And the three points on his head represent the three places on the podium for the medal winners.</li> </ul>
Rio 2016	 Vinicius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The name pays tribute to Brazilian musician Vinicius de Moraes.</li> <li>- Vinicius is a mix of different Brazilian animals. His design takes inspiration from pop culture, as well as video games and animation characters.</li> <li>- He represents the diversity of the Brazilian people and culture, as well as its exuberant nature.</li> </ul>
Beijing 2008	 Miraitowa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Miraitowa comes from the combination of two Japanese words: mirai, which means “future”, and towa, which means “eternity”.</li> <li>- With its traditional and futurist style, the mascot embodies both the old and the new, echoing the concept of “innovation from harmony”.</li> </ul>

Resource: The Olympic Studies Centre (2019a).

The types and characteristics of mascots from Munich 1972 to Tokyo 2020 are as follows.

First, the material of the mascot was mainly animal-based. Of the 20 mascots, 14 were developed with animal materials. Mascots were created by simplifying or personifying animals and designed using animals representing the host country. There were many mascots that simplified animals until Barcelona 1992, but after Atlanta 1996, unique and different abstract expressions of mascots that were far from animals and humans began to be developed.

Second, the number of mascots made for each summer Olympic is as follows. Since Munich 1972, one mascot has been used for each competition. But three types of mascots were created for Sydney 2000 Olympics, and two types of mascots were designed for the 2004 Summer Olympics, In the case of the Beijing 2008, as many as five types of mascots were developed and used, but the one type of mascot has been used again since London 2012.

#### 4. Access to Olympic Mascot Attributes

Mascots are useful tools for visual communication and brand marketing today. They should have the characteristics of enhancing the significance and external interest of the Olympics while showing the largest image as a small one and expanding its meaning infinitely widely through a concise form. The five attributes of the mascot are as follows.

First, the Olympic mascot has friendliness. The Olympic mascot was visually expressed so that the venue of the global festival called the Olympics feels closer and more friendly to the public. The friendly expression of the mascot helped modern people living in a mechanized and urbanized world to remind them of the sound spirit and the importance of human peace pursued by the Olympics. Many mascots have been designed primarily for animals, including Waldi and Cobi, which can be said to be an expression of the closeness to animals felt by humans.

Second, the Olympic mascot has a symbolic meaning. This was visualized so that it can be easily recognized without additional explanation. The Mascot should have a strong image on the outside and should be visualized as an expression of the host country or the Olympics itself. Visual designs such as the display of the Olympic ring and the color match with the Olympic flag shown on various mascots are examples of further strengthening symbolism.

Third, the Olympic mascot has originality. the mascot with unique and differentiated characteristics of the host Olympics should be developed. There are various factors such as mascot material, brand design, storytelling, and technical aspects to express the originality of the mascot. Olympic mascots such as Lizzie, Phevos and Athena, and Wenlock can be said to have used these factors to create great works by differentiating them from the materials of the already released mascots.

Fourth, the Olympic mascot has diversity. While maintaining its essence as a mascot, the Olympic mascot emphasized its characteristics as a variety of tools that reflect the material of the mascot, changes in technology according to the times, artistry, and value as product. Among the mascots, the number of mascots in the Beijing 2008 was the highest with five, and each mascot represents the diversity of water (prosperity), forest (happiness), fire (Olympic spirit), earth (good health), and sky (good luck).

Fifth, the Olympic mascot has a value that can be used repeatedly. There are many mascots in the world, but among them, the Olympic mascots have received the most attention and have the most practical value that can be

remembered by humans for a long time. Recently, as the brand value of Olympic mascots has increased, companies are strengthening their strategies to differentiate Olympic mascots into brands by using products using mascots as well as promotional tools.

#### 4. Conclusion and Limitation

In the Olympic games, the mascot represents the identity of the venue, and at the same time, acts as a means of brand marketing for the Olympics, attracting and fostering public participation. The mascot is a representative legacy that remembers the games themselves after the end of the Olympics. This study began with an interest in the meaning and importance of Olympic mascots, and this paper was conducted as the first step in dealing with the mascots of the Summer Olympic games from Munich 1972 to Tokyo 2020. The results of this study are summarized as follows.

First, the Olympic mascot is a symbol to promote the hosting and success of the Olympic Games to the world. As the Olympic mascot, Shuss was first introduced at the 1968 Winter Olympics in Grenoble, but the 1972 Munich Olympic mascot, Waldi is known as the first official mascot.

Second, the Olympic mascots were divided into three periods (from Munich 1972 to Atlanta 1996, from Sydney 2000 to Beijing 2008, and from London 2012 to Tokyo 2020) to identify the types and characteristics of each mascot. As a result of the analysis, mascots are designed the most in animal form. But the process of change according to the material of the Olympic mascot changed from a simple animal form to a finely expressed hybrid mascot, and multiple mascots appeared from the 2000s.

Third, five attributes of the Olympic mascots in modern society were identified: friendliness, a symbolic meaning, originality, diversity, and value. The friendly appearance of the Olympic mascots not only narrows the distance from the public but also serves as a representative symbol of the Olympics, comfortably conveying the cultural and historical characteristics and messages of the host country. The Olympic mascots have been created in original forms through a combination of character materials, facial expressions, gestures, and colors, and have been developed in a variety of forms that can meet the natural locality of the Olympics or the commerciality pursued by the modern Olympics. In addition, mascots are one of the representative licensing products that generate a lot of revenue before and after the Olympics, and mascots must have the property of value that can be used continuously.

This study has the following several limitations. First, as mentioned earlier, this study dealt with only the mascots of the Summer Olympics, and the Winter Olympics mascots were excluded from this study. Second, this study focused on searching the literature on the Olympic mascots and did not conduct an approach in the field of visual design. Third, to confirm the meaning of this study, an empirical survey on the attributes and preferences of the Olympic mascots in future studies is needed.

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