

Study Regarding the Impact of Olympic Mascots in the Financial Success of the International Olympic Committee

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Abstract

Even though the Olympic Games have benefited from exceptional athletic results, it has happened that the organizing cities remained in huge financial debts, some examples being Mexico City and Montreal, which carried the load of a budget deficit because of the Games for more than 30 years. This is why the marketing department of the I.O.C came up with the idea of introducing mascots among the Olympic symbols, the sales of which have helped the I.O.C and the organizers contribute to the I.O.C budget. This paper aims to emphasize the evolution of the mascots, both artistically and financially. The paper analyzes the income from mascot sales and the impact that they had and still have on supporting the Olympic movement, highlighting the necessity for a greater importance to be given to this aspect, for both the development of the Olympic Games and the financial success of other competitions.

Keywords: mascots, Olympism, finances

Introduction

The Olympic Games are, indisputably, mankind's most important athletic event, the International Olympic Committee being currently the largest international organization in the world.

The 121 years of modern Olympics were possible also thanks to the I.O.C management, which, starting with 1968, addressed the problem of financial sustainability, both for the Games, and for the programs of Olympic education and of support for the third world countries, helping them to participate in the Olympic Games.

Even though the Olympic Games have benefited from exceptional athletic results, it has happened that the organizing cities to remain in huge financial debts, some examples being Mexico City and Montreal, which carried the load of a budget deficit because of the Games for more than 30 years. This is why the marketing department of the I.O.C came up with the idea of introducing mascots among the Olympic symbols, the sales of which have helped the IOC and the organizers contribute to the I.O.C budget.

The mascots represent the most powerful instrument for communicating the Olympic spirit to the public, in general, and to the youths and children, in particular.

After the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games, the mascot becomes one of the most important instruments in raising funds for the I.O.C. and for the organizing country.

The I.O.C. generates income for the Olympic Movement through several major marketing programs, including the sell of broadcasting rights and The Olympic Partner (TOP) Program. Over 90% of this income is redistributed to the larger athletic movement, which means that every day the I.O.C. gives the equivalent of 3.25 million US dollars to help athletes and sports organizations over the world. The International Olympic Committee and the organizations inside the Olympic Movement are fully privately funded, the I.O.C. managing the media rights sale for the Olympic Games, the TOP sponsorship program worldwide, and the I.O.C. official suppliers and the licensing programs. Figure 1 shows the percentage of the attracted funds.

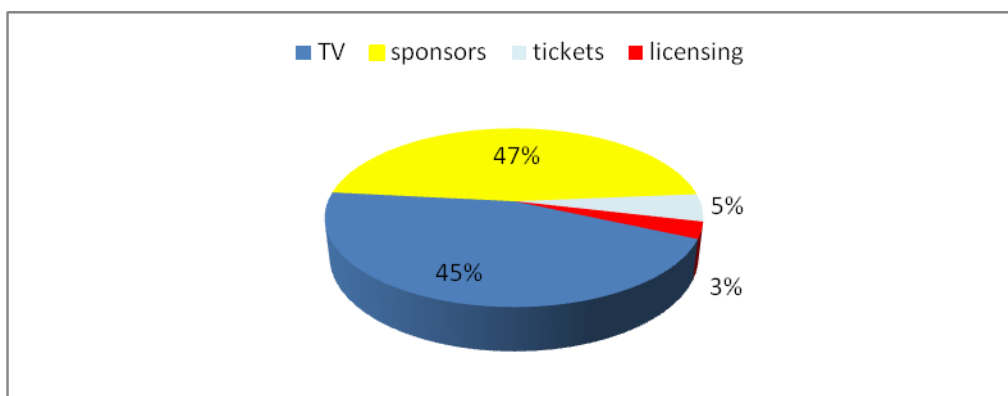


Fig.1. Percentage of funds attracted

The I.O.C. distributes over 90% of its incomes to the organizations inside the Olympic Movement to support the organization of the Olympic Games and to promote the worldwide development of sports. The I.O.C. keeps less than 10% of its incomes for the operational and administrative costs involved in the management of the Olympic Movement.

2. Objectives, Materials and Methods

This paper aims to highlight the marketing dynamics of the I.O.C. in regard to attracting funds, as a result of the need to diversify the sources of income, the post-World War Two Olympic Games up to 1984 being accompanied by considerable economic losses for the organizers and a modest income to the I.O.C. budget.

This study started from the following hypotheses:

1. The Olympic mascots, officially introduced in 1972, have contributed over time to increasing the visibility of the Games, and forming the organizational culture, being assimilated to the Olympics;
2. The funds collected from selling the license rights for the Olympic symbols have an ascending progress, being very important for the I.O.C. budget, which can ulteriorly invest in the Olympic education.

The idea of introducing mascots is old, dating from 1968, when the Grenoble Winter Olympics Organizing Committee suggested and made a mascot representing a stylized skier. The success of the mascot among participants and spectators has determined the I.O.C. marketing department to ask the Munich Olympics organizers to create an official mascot, which they did - the first official mascot of the Olympic Games, Waldi.

Since 1972, the year in which the first mascot made its official appearance at the Munich Olympics, mascots have become one of the most important elements of the Olympic Games imagery.

As a unique and popular image, full of vitality, a mascot can embody the Olympic spirit, giving an identity for each edition of the Olympic Games, promoting the culture and history of the organizing country, giving the Games a festive, cheerful, and relaxed look.

This author has reviewed the professional literature, consulting the official materials by the organizing bodies of the summer Olympics.

Results

Table 1 below presents the official summer Olympics mascots and their description, aiming to identify their contribution to the popularization of the Olympic Games.

Table 1 Official summer Olympics mascots

year	description
1972	Waldi - this Olympic mascot imitates a dachshund dog, a very popular animal in Bavaria, famed for its endurance, tenacity and agility. The mascot features pastel colors to highlight the joy and happiness of the Olympics.
1976	Amik - the Montreal Olympics mascot. Canada is represented by a beaver, an animal that is specific to

	North America and Canada in particular. Amik means beaver in Algonquin, a widespread language among the North American Indians in Canada. Also, in the Canadian tradition, the beaver is the symbol for hard work done with intelligence.
1980	Mischa - the Moscow Olympics mascot; the bear was created by one of the greatest comics creator in the USSR, Victor Chizhikov, Misha being one of the most successful mascots ever created.
1984	Sam - the Los Angeles Olympics mascot, conceived by C. Robert Moore from Walt Disney Productions, was a cartoon eagle dressed as Uncle Sam, in the colors of the USA flag, with a top hat on his head and holding a torch. The success of this mascot was undisputed.
1988	Hodori - the Seoul Olympics mascot was an orange-colored tiger designed by Kim Hyun. Hodori's image suggests Korean friendship and hospitality. The "Ho" of Hodori comes from the Korean word meaning tiger, while "Dori" is a common masculine diminutive.
1992	Cobi -the mascot of the Barcelona Olympics. The Olympic Organizing Committee produced an animated series featuring Cobi, to promote the image of the Olympic Games. The mascot represents a dog and it was created by the Valencia artist Javier Mariscal.
1996	Izzy - the mascot of the Atlanta Olympics was the first mascot to be completely computer generated. It represents an anthropomorphic image that is at the same time abstract and imaginary. Izzy's smile would mean "What is it?".
2000	Syd, Olly and Millie - the mascots of the Sydney Olympics, is the first multiple mascot, created by Matthew Hatton, and representing three specific Australian animals, symbolizing earth, air and water. Olly is a kookaburra, highlighting the generosity of the Australian people, Syd is a platypus representing the earth and highlighting the Australian vigor and energy, while Millie is an echidna or spiny anteater, representing the innovating spirit.
2004	Athena and Phevos - the mascots for the Athens Olympics. The names of the two mascots are a reference to two gods of Olympus: "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. They owe their strange shape to a typical terracotta doll in the shape of a bell from the 7th century BC, the "daidala". They symbolise the pleasure of playing and the values of Olympism.
2008	The Beijing Olympics mascots were five: Beibei, Jingjing, Huanhuan, Yingying and Nini . Beibei , the fish, is a reference to the element of water; she is blue and her wish is prosperity. Jingjing , the panda, represents the forest; he is black and his wish is happiness. Huanhuan symbolizes fire and the Olympic spirit; his red color transmits the passion for sport. Yingying , the Tibetan antelope, represents earth; he is yellow and his wish is good health. Nini , the swallow, represents the sky; she is green and her wish is good luck. Each name rhymes by repeating the same syllable and is a traditional Chinese way of showing affection to children. Linking the five names forms the sentence "Welcome to Beijing" (Bei Jing Huan Ying Nin).
2012	Wenlock , the London Olympics mascot, takes his name from the town of Much Wenlock in Shropshire, which still hosts the traditional Much Wenlock Games. These were one of Pierre de Coubertin's sources of inspiration for the modern Olympic Games. According to the story by Michael Morpurgo, Wenlock's 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. The light on his head is based on those found on London's famous black cabs.
2016	Vinicius , the Rio de Janeiro Olympics mascot, got his name in honor of the Brazilian composer Vinicius de Moraes. Vinicius is a mix of different Brazilian animals. His design takes inspiration from pop culture, as well as video game and animation characters. Alongside his Paralympic Games colleague, Vinicius represents the diversity of the Brazilian people and culture, as well as its exuberant nature.

The second main source of income for the I.O.C. are the broadcasting rights, which began to be paid starting with the London Olympics in 1948, when the BBC paid \$ 3000; starting with the 1960 Rome Olympic Games, the broadcasting rights changed into television rights. The received income rate for these rights is continuously ascending and represents, as previously stated, 45% of the total rights charged, the sums being

smaller only than the ones received from sponsors, which, in their turn, are divided into official sponsors and partners. Table 2 presents the sums paid as television rights and Figure 2 presents their continuous ascension.

Table 2 Television rights charged by the I.O.C.

City	Year	Sum (millions \$)
Rome	1960	1.2
Tokyo	1964	1.6
Mexico City	1968	9.8
Munich	1972	17.8
Montreal	1976	34.9
Moscow	1980	88
Los Angeles	1984	286.9
Seoul	1988	402.6
Barcelona	1992	636.1
Atlanta	1996	898.3
Sydney	2000	1.331
Athens	2004	1.494
Beijing	2008	1.739

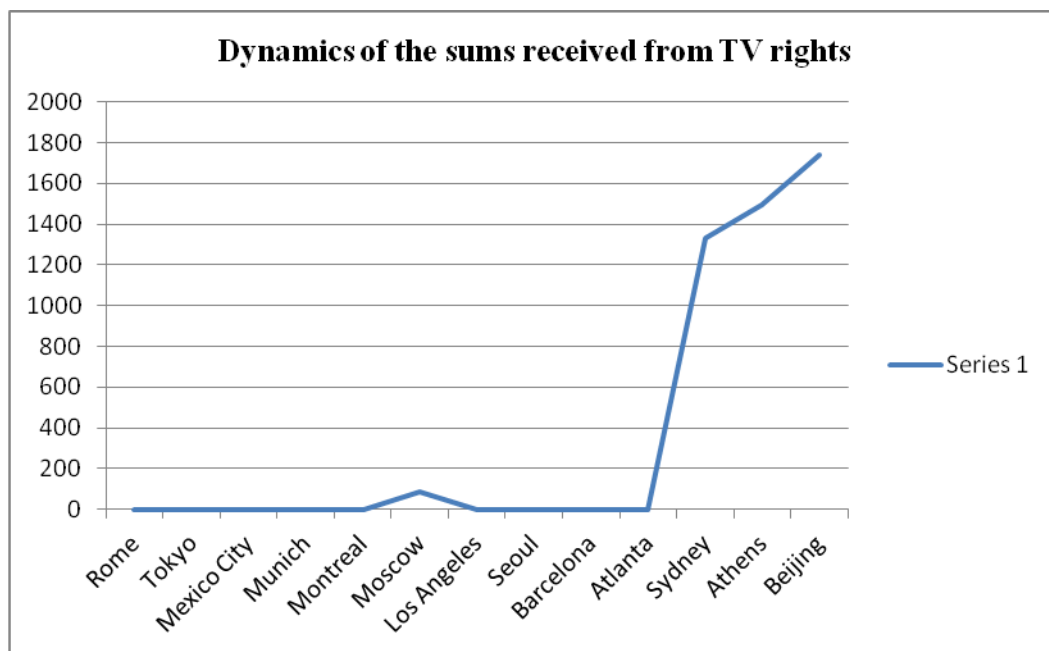


Fig. 2 Dynamics of the sums received from TV rights by the I.O.C.

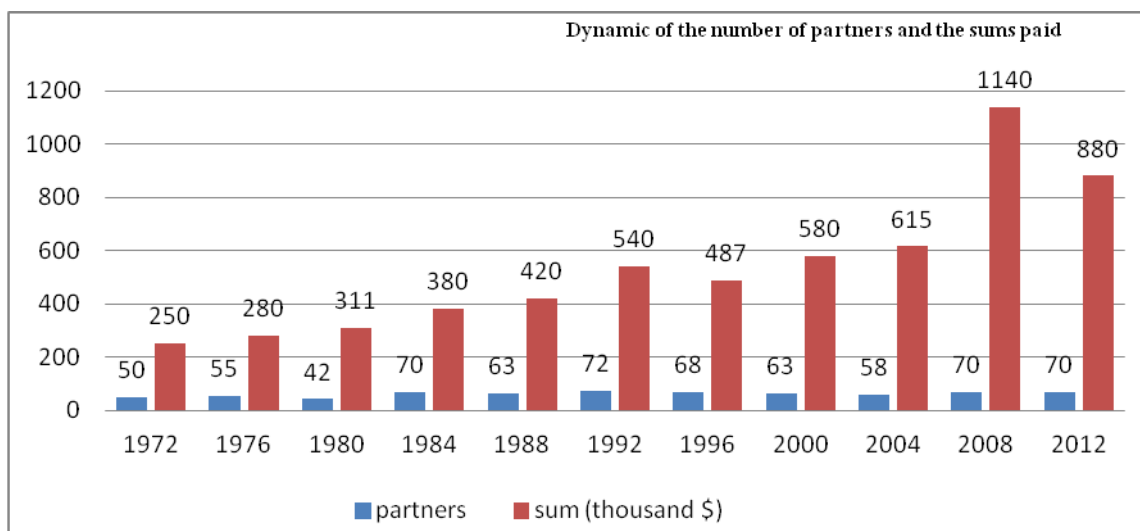


Figure 3 below presents the dynamic of the number of partners licensed to produce the Olympic mascots

Conclusions

Licensing, which is selling the right to replicate a trademarked product to a third party, allows the organizers to receive a considerable income.

The mascots, reflecting the cultural and symbolic characteristics of the host city or nation, represent the optimal way of collaboration between the I.O.C., the local organizing committees and private partners. The introduction of Waldi during the Munich Olympics represented the way in which the I.O.C. reached the hearts of children, thus developing since early childhood the interest for Olympism and the Olympic Games. Also, the sale of mascots to officials and athletes increases their enthusiasm, transforming the mascots into good luck charms for a long period of time.

Basically, over 90% of the Olympic Games spectators and participants buy at least one mascot, and to them we can add the number of journalists and officials present during the competitions, which is almost equal to the number of athletes, thus being able to deduce pretty easily the sum that can be raised from selling mascots.

The mascots become symbols of the Olympic Games, being identified with them, and constituting an important means of communication and involving young people in the Olympic education.

It can thus be said that the sums received from selling the mascots represents more than half of the sums received from ticket selling, which highlights once again the benefit of using the mascots.

Unfortunately, the I.O.C. still depends on sponsors, which are chosen according to the sums received and the specificity of the companies; thus, the I.O.C. does not accept sponsorship from tobacco or alcohol companies, but it does accept, unfortunately, sponsorship from fast food and energy drink companies, thus advertising products that have a negative effect on the health of the population, especially of the young people.

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