

# ANALYSING THE EVOLUTION OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST CORPORATIONS IN THE PERIOD 2019-2021

Sorin-George Toma<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract:**

*Since the end of the Second World War, corporations, irrespective of their size and field of activity, have witnessed a period of extraordinary expansion all over the world. In this respect, multinational corporations and transnational corporations have increasingly become major players in the world economy. Also, they have been and are largely involved in the rapid spread of the globalization process during the last decades. The paper aims to briefly analyse the evolution of the world's ten largest corporations by their total revenues and profits in the period 2019-2021. A qualitative research method was used based on secondary data research in order to achieve the objective of the paper. The results of the paper show that these high-performance corporations are acting in key economic sectors and are mostly located in the United States of America and the People's Republic of China.*

**Keywords:** corporation, multinational corporation, transnational corporation, revenue, profit

**JEL Classification:** F00, F23

## **1. Introduction**

Since the end of the Second World War, corporations, irrespective of their size and field of activity, have witnessed a period of extraordinary expansion all over the world. In this respect, multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) have increasingly become major players in the world economy (Hedlund and Dunning, 1993; Michie, 2019). Also, they have been and are largely involved in the rapid spread of the globalization process during the last decades (Foley et al., 2021). The automotive industry (Grădinaru et al., 2020), the banking sector (Toma and Grădinaru, 2018a), the energy sector (Toma et al., 2015) and the pharmaceutical industry (Toma and Catană, 2021) represent illustrative examples.

The age of MNCs and TNCs has certainly arrived since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is said that MNCs and TNCs are believed to „promote growth and employment by creating new jobs, realise new investments, bring in new technologies, and allow host economies to integrate and upgrade in global value chains” (De Backer and Miroudot, 2019, p. 1). Moreover, they own a great part of global production, play a fundamental role in foreign direct investment (Kolodner, 1994), are implicated in shaping countries' modes of production and creating countries' comparative advantages (Alviarez, 2019), in deepening countries' economies interconnectedness (Kyove et al., 2021) or in affecting the trade policies of various governments (Blanchard and Matschke, 2015), and, therefore, influence the evolution of the world economy (Toma, 2019).

The paper aims to briefly analyse the evolution of the world's ten largest corporations by their total revenues and profits in the period 2019-2021. The paper is structured as follows: the next chapter illustrates the literature review. The research methodology is displayed in the third chapter of the paper. The fourth chapter presents the results. The conclusions are shown at the end of the paper.

## **2. Literature review**

During the time, the concept of corporation has become a key topic in the business literature. Being studied from different perspectives, this term may be defined as:

- a “specific legal form of organization of persons and material resources, chartered by the state, for the purpose of conducting business” (Tikkanen, 2022, p.1).

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor, Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest, tomagsorin62@yahoo.com

- „a legal entity created by individuals, [stockholders](#), or shareholders, with the purpose of operating for profit” (Corporate Finance Institute, 2022a, p.1).

- “an entity, like a company or group of people, that is legally treated as a single, fictional person” (Berry-Johnson, 2022, p.1).

Also, there is a plethora of approaches regarding the definitions of MNCs and TNCs. A MNC is seen as:

- “a company that has business operations in at least one country other than its home country” (Brock, 2022, p.1).

- „a corporate organization that owns or controls production of goods or services in at least one country other than its home country (IGI Global, 2022, p1).

- „a company that operates in its home country, as well as in other countries around the world” (Corporate Finance Institute, 2022b, p.1).

On its turn, a TNC is considered as:

- „an enterprise that controls assets of other entities in economies other than its home economy, usually by owning a certain equity capital stake” (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2004, p.40).

- “an enterprise that is involved with the international production of goods or services, foreign investments, or income and asset management in more than one country” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2022, p.1).

- “a company that is controlled from its home country but has large operations in many different countries” (Oxford Reference, 2022, p.1).

Despite the fact that there is no consensus about the meaning of these above-mentioned concepts, these definitions reveal several of their features. Firstly, a corporation constitutes a legal entity that deploys business activities. Secondly, it gathers people and other resources in order to obtain profit. Thirdly, MNCs and TNCs are corporations that own businesses in several countries others than their home country. Fourthly, the global strategy of MNCs encompasses the needs of their national subsidiaries whereas in the case of TNCs these subsidiaries are strategic partners (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2002).

In recent years, several studies related to the evolution of the largest MNCs and TNCs at a global level were published (Toma, 2013; Toma et al., 2016a; Grădinaru and Toma, 2018). They outline the central position held by these corporations within today’s world economy.

### **3. Research methodology**

In order to achieve the objective of the paper, the author employed a research methodology based on a qualitative method. In this regard, he collected, analysed, and synthesized numerous information through desk research from various secondary data sources such as articles and books from electronic databases and libraries.

### **4. Results and discussion**

This chapter of the paper displays and analyses the evolution of the ten largest corporations operating at a global level, in terms of their total revenues and profits. The period 2019-2021 witnessed the clear domination of the American retailer Wal-Mart at the top of the world’s largest corporations by their total revenues (Tables no. 1, 2 and 3). In this sense, the first ten largest corporations activate in different domains as follows:

- five corporations in 2019 (Sinopec Group, China National Petroleum, Royal Dutch Shell, British Petroleum (BP), Saudi Aramco), two corporations in 2020 (China National Petroleum, Sinopec Group), and three corporation in 2021 (China National Petroleum, Sinopec Group, Saudi Aramco) were from the petroleum refining industry;

- two corporations in 2019 and 2020 (Volkswagen, Toyota Motor), and one corporation in 2021 (Volkswagen) were from the automotive industry;

- two corporations in 2019, 2020, and 2021 (Wal-Mart, Amazon) were from the retailing sector;
- two corporations in 2020 (CVS Health, UnitedHealth Group) and one corporation (CVS Health) in 2021 were from the pharmaceutical sector and health care system;
- one corporation in 2019, 2020, and 2021 (State Grid) was from the distribution of electricity;
- one corporation in 2020 and 2021 (Apple) was from the IT&C sector;
- one corporation in 2021 (China State Construction Engineering) was from the construction sector.

The headquarters of these corporations are located as follows:

- five corporations in the United States of America (Wal-Mart, Amazon, Apple, CVS Health, UnitedHealth Group);
- four corporations in the People’s Republic of China (Sinopec Group, China National Petroleum, State Grid, China State Construction Engineering);
- one corporation in Japan (Toyota Motor);
- one corporation in the United Kingdom (BP);
- one corporation in Netherlands (Royal Dutch Shell);
- one corporation in Germany (Volkswagen);
- one corporation in Saudi Arabia (Saudi Aramco).

**Table no. 1. The world’s ten largest corporations by their total revenues in 2019**

No.	Corporation	Revenues (\$B)
1.	Wal-Mart	523.964
2.	Sinopec Group	407.009
3.	State Grid	383.906
4.	China National Petroleum	379.130
5.	Royal Dutch Shell	352.106
6.	Saudi Aramco	329.784
7.	Volkswagen	282.760
8.	BP	282.716
9.	Amazon	280.522
10.	Toyota Motor	275.288

Source: Fortune, August/September 2020, <https://fortune.com/global500/2020/>

**Table no. 2. The world’s ten largest corporations by their total revenues in 2020**

No.	Corporation	Revenues (\$B)
1.	Wal-Mart	559.151
2.	State Grid	386.617
3.	Amazon	386.064
4.	China National Petroleum	283.957
5.	Sinopec Group	282.727
6.	Apple	274.515
7.	CVS Health	268.706
8.	UnitedHealth Group	257.141
9.	Toyota Motor	256.721
10.	Volkswagen	253.965

Source: Fortune, August/September 2021, <https://fortune.com/global500/2021/>

**Table no. 3. The world's ten largest corporations by their total revenues in 2021**

No.	Corporation	Revenues (\$B)
1.	Wal-Mart	572.754
2.	Amazon	469.822
3.	State Grid	460.616
4.	China National Petroleum	411.692
5.	Sinopec Group	401.313
6.	Saudi Aramco	400.399
7.	Apple	365.817
8.	Volkswagen	295.819
9.	China State Construction Engineering	293.712
10.	CVS Health	292.111

Source: Fortune, August/September 2022, <https://fortune.com/global500/2022/>

In 2019 and 2021, Saudi Aramco was the most profitable corporation in the world, being replaced by Apple in 2020 (Tables no. 4, 5 and 6). In this respect, the first ten largest corporations activate in various domains as follows:

- six corporations in 2019 (Berkshire Hathaway, Industrial & Commercial Bank of China, China Construction Bank, JP Morgan Chase, Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of America), five corporations in 2020 (Softbank Group, Industrial & Commercial Bank of China, Berkshire Hathaway, China Construction Bank, Agricultural Bank of China), and five corporations in 2021 (Berkshire Hathaway, Industrial & Commercial Bank of China, JP Morgan Chase, China Construction Bank, Agricultural Bank of China) were from the banking and financial sector;
- three corporations in 2019 (Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet), four corporations (Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Facebook), and four corporations in 2021 (Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Meta Platforms) were from the IT&C sector;
- one corporation in 2019, 2020, and 2021 (Saudi Aramco) was from the petroleum refining industry.

The headquarters of these corporations are located as follows:

- eight corporations in the United States of America (Berkshire Hathaway, Apple, Microsoft, JP Morgan Chase, Alphabet, Bank of America, Facebook, Meta Platforms);
- three corporations in the People's Republic of China (Industrial & Commercial Bank of China, China Construction Bank, Agricultural Bank of China);
- one corporation in Japan (Softbank Group);
- one corporation in Saudi Arabia (Saudi Aramco).

**Table no. 4. The world's ten largest corporations by their profit in 2019**

No.	Corporation	Profit (\$B)
1.	Saudi Aramco	88.210
2.	Berkshire Hathaway	81.417
3.	Apple	55.256
4.	Industrial & Commercial Bank of China	45.194
5.	Microsoft	39.240
6.	China Construction Bank	38.609
7.	JP Morgan Chase	36.431
8.	Alphabet	34.343
9.	Agricultural Bank of China	30.701
10.	Bank of America	27.430

Source: Fortune, August/September 2020, <https://fortune.com/global500/2020/>

**Table no. 5. The world's ten largest corporations by their profit in 2020**

No.	Corporation	Profit (\$B)
1.	Apple	57.411
2.	Saudi Aramco	49.287
3.	Softbank Group	47.053
4.	Industrial & Commercial Bank of China	45.783
5.	Microsoft	44.281
6.	Berkshire Hathaway	42.521
7.	Alphabet	40.269
8.	China Construction Bank	39.283
9.	Agricultural Bank of China	31.293
10.	Facebook	29.146

Source: Fortune, August/September 2021, <https://fortune.com/global500/2021/>

**Table no. 6. The world's ten largest corporations by their profit in 2021**

No.	Corporation	Profit (\$B)
1.	Saudi Aramco	105.369
2.	Apple	94.680
3.	Berkshire Hathaway	89.795
4.	Alphabet	76.033
5.	Microsoft	61.271
6.	Industrial & Commercial Bank of China	54.003
7.	JP Morgan Chase	48.334
8.	China Construction Bank	46.898
9.	Meta Platforms	39.370
10.	Agricultural Bank of China	37.390

Source: Fortune, August/September 2022, <https://fortune.com/global500/2022/>

In the period 2019-2021, MNCs and TNCs dominated in an obvious manner the top of the world's largest corporations. The above results reveal some interesting issues:

- The American and Chinese corporations were highly predominant and held leading positions in these two rankings (total revenues and profits).
- Wal-Mart was the biggest corporation in the world by its total revenues in the period 2019-2021.
- The top of the first ten world's largest corporations by their total revenues were pretty much the same in the period 2019-2021. Six corporations remained the same within the top.
- Saudi Aramco (twice) and Apple (once) were the most profitable corporations in the world in the period 2019-2021.
- The top of the first ten world's largest corporations by their profits remained pretty much the same in the period 2019-2021. eight corporations were the same in the top.

These highly successful mncs and tncs have proved to share several common characteristics, such as strategic thinking (toma et al., 2016b; toma and grădinaru, 2016c), entrepreneurial orientation (grădinaru et al., 2017; zainea et al., 2020), business organizations using thriving techniques and methods (toma, 2008; tohănean et al., 2018; catană and toma, 2021), creative thinking (toma et al., 2018b), quality champions (toma and naruo, 2009), and socially responsible behaviour (toma et al., 2011; imbrișcă and toma, 2020).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In the past decades, MNCs and TNCs continued to dominate the global business arena. This is why numerous researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have understood and recognized their influence and impact on a global scale.

The paper demonstrates that the world's largest corporations obtained impressive achievements in terms of total revenues and profits. Also, it shows that these high-performance MNCs and TNCs are acting in key economic sectors, such as the petroleum refining industry, the pharmaceutical sector, retailing, the IT&C sector, and the banking and financial sector. The vast majority of them are located in the United States of America and the People's Republic of China.

## REFERENCES

1. Alviarez, V., 2019. Multinational production and comparative advantage. *Journal of International Economics*, 119(1), pp.1-54.
2. Bartlett, C. A., Ghoshal, S., 2002. *Managing Across Borders: The Transnational Solution*. Boston, MA; Harvard Business School Press.
3. Berry-Johnson, J., 2022. *Corporation: What it is and how to form one*. Investopedia, 03.01.2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/corporation.asp>> [Accessed 10 November 2022].
4. Blanchard, E., Matschke, X., 2015. U.S. Multinationals and Preferential Market Access. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 97(4), pp.839-854.
5. Brock, T., 2022. *Multinational corporation: Definition, how it works, four types*. Investopedia, 29.07.2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/multinationalcorporation.asp>> [Accessed 03 November 2022].
6. Catană, Ș., Toma, S.-G., 2021. Marketing mix and corporate social responsibility in automotive industry—Case study: Mazda Motor Corporation. *Annals of the „Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu Jiu, Economy Series*, 1, pp.205-209. [online] Available at: <[https://www.utgiu.ro/revista/ec/pdf/2021-01/30\\_Catana.pdf](https://www.utgiu.ro/revista/ec/pdf/2021-01/30_Catana.pdf)> [Accessed 03 November 2022].
7. Corporate Finance Institute, 2022a. *Corporation*. CFI Team, 02.11.2022. [online] Available at: <<https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/accounting/what-is-corporation-overview/>> [Accessed 12 November 2022].
8. Corporate Finance Institute, 2022b. *What is a multinational corporation (MNC)?* CFI Team, 27.10.2022. [online] Available at: <<https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/multinational-corporation/>> [Accessed 12 November 2022].
9. De Backer, C., Miroudot, S., 2019. *Multinational enterprises in the global economy: Heavily discussed, hardly measured*. CEPR, 25.09.2019. [online] Available at: <<https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/multinational-enterprises-global-economy-heavily-discussed-hardly-measured>> [Accessed 11 November 2022].
10. Foley, C. F., Hines, J., Wessel, D., eds., 2021. *Global Goliaths: Multinational Corporations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economy*. Washington: Brookings Institution Press.
11. Fortune, 2020. *Global 500*. August/September 2020. [online] Available at: <<https://fortune.com/global500/2020/>> [Accessed 11 November 2022].
12. Fortune, 2021. *Global 500*. August/September 2021. [online] Available at: <<https://fortune.com/global500/2021/>> [Accessed 11 November 2022].

13. Fortune, 2022. *Global 500*. August/September 2022. [online] Available at: <<https://fortune.com/global500/2022/>> [Accessed 11 November 2022].
14. Grădinaru, C., Toma, S.-G., Papuc, R., 2017. Entrepreneurship in the world: The analysis of the Global Entrepreneurship Index in the period 2015-2017. *“Ovidius” University Annals- Economic Sciences Series*, 17(2), pp.14-18. [online] Available at: <<https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/ENG/2017-2/Section%20I/3.pdf>> [Accessed 02 November 2022].
15. Grădinaru, C., Toma, S.-G., 2018. The largest corporations in the world in the period 2016-2017. *Annals of the „Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu Jiu, Economy Series, Special Issue*, pp.68-73. [online] Available at: <[https://www.utgjiu.ro/revista/ec/pdf/2018-SPECIAL/08\\_Gradinaru.pdf](https://www.utgjiu.ro/revista/ec/pdf/2018-SPECIAL/08_Gradinaru.pdf)> [Accessed 02 November 2022].
16. Grădinaru, C., Toma, S.-G., Zanea, L. N., 2020. Japanese versus German supremacy in the global automotive sector. *Ovidius University Annals- Economic Sciences Series*, 20(1), pp.78-83. [online] Available at: <<https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/RO/2020/Section%20I/11.pdf>> [Accessed 07 November 2022].
17. Hedlund, G., Dunning, J. H., eds., 1993. *Organization of Transnational Corporations*. London: Routledge.
18. IGI Global, 2022. What is multinational corporation. [online] Available at: <<https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/multinational-corporation/35625>> [Accessed 13 November 2022].
19. Imbrișcă, C., Toma, S.-G., 2020. Social responsibility, a key dimension in developing a sustainable higher education institution: The case of students’ motivation. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 22(54), pp.447- 461.
20. Kyove, J., Streltsova, K., Odibo, U., Cirella, G. T., 2021. Globalization impact on multinational enterprises. *World*, 2(2), pp.216-230.
21. Kolodner, E., 1994. *Transnational corporations: Impediments or catalysts of social development?* UNRISD Occasional Paper: World Summit for Social Development, No. 5. Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. [online] Available at: <<https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/148776/1/862517141.pdf>> [Accessed 11 November 2022].
22. Michie, J., ed., 2019. *The Handbook of Globalisation*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
23. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights- United Nations, 2022. *Transnational corporation*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/taxonomy/term/835>> [Accessed 04 November 2022].
24. Oxford Reference, 2022. *Transnational corporation*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803105436546>> [Accessed 13 November 2022].
25. Tikkanen, A., 2022. *Corporation*. Britannica, 11.2022. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/corporation>> [Accessed 15 November 2022].
26. Tohănean, D., Toma, S.-G., Dumitru, I., 2018. Organizational performance and digitalization in Industry 4.0. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management*, 1(1), pp.282-293.
27. Toma, S.-G., 2008. What is Six Sigma? *Manager*, 8, pp.152–155.
28. Toma, S.-G., Naruo, S., 2009. Quality assurance in the Japanese universities. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 11(26), pp.574-584.
29. Toma, S.-G., Stanciu, C., Irimia, E., 2011. *Landmarks in the evolution of social responsibility of organizations in the twentieth century*. Proceedings of the 5th

- International Scientific Session Challenges of the Knowledge Society. Bucharest: PRO Universitaria, pp.1352-1360. [online] Available at: <<https://doaj.org/article/e24f5d4dc2c9423ca6d71f6216523bf4>> [Accessed 15 November 2022].
30. Toma, S.-G., 2013. *Economia Întreprinderii*. București: Editura Universității din București.
  31. Toma, S.-G., Marinescu, P., Ștefan, C., 2015. The world's largest oil and gas companies in the period 2013-2014. *Ovidius University Annals- Economic Sciences Series*, 15(1), pp.47-50. [online] Available at: <<https://ideas.repec.org/a/ovi/oviste/vxvy2015i1p47-50.html>> [Accessed 04 November 2022].
  32. Toma, S.-G., Marinescu, P., Constantin, I., 2016a. How the ten largest corporations of the world evolved in the period 2014-2015. *Ovidius University Annals- Economic Sciences Series*, 16(2), pp.61-67. [online] Available at: <[http://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/RO/2016/ANALE%20vol%2016\\_issue\\_2\\_site.2](http://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/RO/2016/ANALE%20vol%2016_issue_2_site.2)> [Accessed 09 November 2022].
  33. Toma, S.-G., Marinescu, P., Constantin, I., 2016b. *Approaches to strategic thinking in business organizations*. Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Business Excellence, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, pp.184-191. [online] Available at: <[https://accord.edu.so/course/material/energy-and-climate-change-289/pdf\\_content](https://accord.edu.so/course/material/energy-and-climate-change-289/pdf_content)> [Accessed 13 November 2022].
  34. Toma, S.-G., Grădinaru, C., 2016c. From military strategy to business strategy. *Strategii Manageriale*, 31(1), pp.227-233.
  35. Toma, S.-G., Grădinaru, C., 2018a. Too Big To Fail banks in the age of globalization. *Annals of the „Constantin Brâncuși” University of Târgu Jiu, Economy Series*, Special Issue, pp.131-136. [online] Available at: <[https://www.utgjiu.ro/revista/ec/pdf/2018-SPECIAL/17\\_Toma.pdf](https://www.utgjiu.ro/revista/ec/pdf/2018-SPECIAL/17_Toma.pdf)> [Accessed 08 November 2022].
  36. Toma, S.-G., Peptenatu, D., Andronache, I., Ahammer, H., Pintilii, R.-D., Draghici, C.-C. and Simion, A. G., 2018b. The creative economy in Romania, a key factor of economic integration in the European Union. In: Dima, A., ed. 2018. *Doing Business in Europe*. pp. 329–350. Cham: Springer. pp.329-350.
  37. Toma, S.-G., 2019. The evolution of the ten largest corporations of the world in the period 2017-2018. *SEA-Practical Application of Science*, 7(21), pp.213-219. [online] Available at: <[https://seaopenresearch.eu/Journals/articles/SPAS\\_21\\_6.pdf](https://seaopenresearch.eu/Journals/articles/SPAS_21_6.pdf)> [Accessed 05 November 2022].
  38. Toma, S.-G., Catană, Ș., 2021. Big Pharma, big business. *Ovidius University Annals- Economic Sciences Series*, 21(1), pp.677-683. [online] Available at: <<https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/RO/2021/Section%204/31.pdf>> [Accessed 07 November 2022].
  39. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2004. *Transnational corporations and foreign affiliates*. [online] Available at: <[https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdscsir20041c3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdscsir20041c3_en.pdf)> [Accessed 07 November 2022].
  40. Zainea, L. N., Toma, S.-G., Marinescu, P., Chițimiea, A., 2020. Combating unemployment through social entrepreneurship in the European context. *Business Ethics and Leadership*, 4(4), pp.85-98.