

The largest athletic apparel, accessories and footwear multinational companies: economic characteristics, internationalization

MAŁGORZATA JAWOREK¹, WŁODZIMIERZ KARASZEWSKI²

^{1,2} Department of Investment and Real Estate, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, POLAND

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Abstract:

The internationalization of sport and the resulting popularization of sport-related lifestyles, habits and preferences have an impact on business operations and economic performance of companies in the athletic apparel and accessories market, contributing to their further internationalization. The overall success of this industry can be traced back to the growing demand dictated by the decades-long trend of the cult of the body. The market leaders include companies whose origins date back to the 1930s, whose internationalization was of evolutionary nature, and the so-called latecomers, relative newcomers to the market who have gained the reputation of global players in a short time. The aim of this study is to present the world's largest companies in the athletic apparel and accessories industry (global companies), and define the importance of their capital internationalization in building the international market position. To this end, a variety of sources were consulted, including the Statista, Macrotrends, EquityRT, periodical rankings published by organizations and consulting companies, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Interbrand, as well as lists of the largest companies presented in the Fortune journal. Our findings show that this group comprises several companies, with Nike Inc. and Adidas AG as its leaders. All the studied enterprises strengthened their economic position in the analyzed period. The analysis also shows that the internationalization of business operations contributes to building the international market position.

Key Words: Sports apparel, Nike, Adidas, Internationalization, Multinational Companies

Introduction

Business related to the production and distribution of sports clothing and footwear has proved to be extremely successful in recent years. This is evidenced for example by spectacular financial results of companies in this sector and the growing value of their brands. Sportswear with the logos of Nike, Puma, Adidas, etc. is worn nearly in every corner of the world, by children, teenagers, adults and seniors. The success of enterprises in this industry stems from the universal nature of their products. Trendy sports brands are designed that can fit not only the world of sport, but also the hustle and bustle of the city, and the peace and quiet of the suburbs (Lim 2016).

In recent years, the sports apparel and athletic wear markets have benefited from changing consumer trends. A growing interest in health and wellbeing has led to increased participation in fitness activities. There is also a greater demand for clothes that are both stylish and comfortable, from men and women who have busier lives than before.

As an objective process of accelerated internationalization, globalization has not only entered global economy, but has deeply penetrated human culture, preferences and habits (Kivilcim 2018; George & Wilding 2002), forever changing our relationship with the world around us as well as ourselves. It has also reached the field of sport where its manifestations are nowadays ubiquitous, e.g.: the popularization of certain sports disciplines, mainly through the mass media – television, radio, the Internet (Bondin et al. 2020); organization of sports competitions nearly all over the world; sports tourism – fans traveling to places where sports events are held; economic migration of athletes, coaches, people providing support to them, sports managers, etc.; athletes making use of training infrastructure abroad; etc. Internationalization in sport has also taken a business stand. Not only global but also local sports events attract financial support from business in exchange for the opportunity to use their marketing potential. It is now a regular practice for enterprises to finance local and international sports clubs, federations and sports events. The mass media all over the world invest more and more in purchasing the rights to broadcast sports events, profiting significantly from the rising viewership. Sports companies have become the subject of market trading and their presence on global stock exchanges is no longer limited to isolated cases.

Along with its progressive internationalization, recent decades have also brought an increasing commercialization of sport (Bauer et al. 2005). It has many faces, with sports-related marketing as one of them, where various types of products, also athletic apparel and accessories, are promoted during sports events, with the involvement of high-profile athletes (Goldman & Johns 2009).

The internationalization of sport, primarily the popularization of sport-related lifestyles, habits and preferences, has a specific economic dimension which encompasses business operations of companies in the athletic apparel and accessories industry discussed in this study. The industry is driven by the growing demand inspired by the progressing internationalization of sport due to the aforementioned popularization of what came to be known as a “healthy lifestyle” and the centuries-old human need to care for the body. Since ancient times, mankind’s physical education has been considered an important and integral part of the process for the formation of a fully developed and harmonious personality (Aghyppo et al. 2016). The market growth observed in the past years is stimulated by growing numbers of people attending gyms and fitness clubs and the increasing popularity of outdoor sports and all forms of physical activity which are perceived as a healthy lifestyle or even an antidote to diseases, particularly those related to obesity. People are increasingly taking up recreational activities and engaging in intense sports disciplines. Sport gains importance all over the world, not only as a spectacle but also as a source of entertainment. This, in turn, has a positive effect on sports-related areas of market demand. Consumers are nowadays more likely to spend more on sports clothing and accessories. Importantly, the demand for the athletic apparel and footwear has long gone beyond the actual needs related to practicing sports or physical activity, and has turned into a demand dictated by fashion, not necessarily limited only to young people.

Sports clothing and accessories are now a global market. Like many other markets in the modern world, this one has also undergone an extensive polarization. Next to a limited number of large companies operating on a global scale, there is a significant group of small and medium-sized enterprises that focus on local markets. The group of global players is not homogeneous. It includes companies that have built their market position for decades (Nike Inc., Adidas AG, Puma SE, Columbia Sportswear Company) and latecomers, or fairly fresh brands in this market (Under Armour Inc., Lululemon Inc.).

The aim of this study is to present the world’s largest companies in the athletic apparel and accessories industry (global companies), and define the importance of their capital internationalization in building the international market position.

Material & methods

The study is based on information obtained from the statistical sources, including the Statista, MacroTrends, EquityRT, and on periodical rankings published by organizations and consulting companies such as: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Interbrand, as well as on lists of largest companies presented in the Fortune journal. The study covers the years: 2007-2019. The information includes the following: 1) revenues of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies, 2) assets of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies, 3) employees of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear, 4) number of retail stores of Nike Inc. and Adidas AG, 5) internationalization indicators of Nike Inc. and Adidas AG, 6) position of Nike Inc. and Adidas AG on the Fortune Global 500 as well as 7) brand value of Nike and Adidas. The use of various types of data is subject to its availability and gives a broad overview of the analyzed subject.

The study uses methods such as statistical and economic analysis, comparison, analogies, synthesis as well as the method of measuring and aggregating data, graphical and tabular method. The choice of economic parameters presented below and the related parameter formulas, as proposed by the authors, are based on the results of the preliminary query of the scientific literature on the subject, the available statistical data, as well as the authors’ research experience and own conclusions.

Results

Economic characteristics of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies

The global sports apparel market generated around 181 billion U.S. dollars in revenue in 2019, an increase of more than seven billion U.S. dollars on the previous year. Rising revenues are forecast to continue and estimated to reach around 208 billion U.S. dollars in 2025 (<https://www.statista.com>, accessed on: 30 August 2020). The largest players in this market include Nike Inc., Adidas AG, Puma SE, Under Armour Inc., Lululemon Inc. and Columbia Sportswear Company.

Nike, Inc. is an American multinational corporation which is the world's largest supplier and manufacturer of athletic shoes, apparel and other sports equipment. It was founded in 1964 as Blue Ribbon Sports by Bill Bowerman, a track-and-field coach at the University of Oregon, and his former student Phil Knight. They opened their first retail outlet in 1966 and launched the Nike brand shoe in 1972. The company was renamed Nike Inc., in 1978 and went public two years later (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nike-Inc>, accessed on: 30 August 2020). Nike, Inc. includes the Nike, Converse, Hurley, and Jordan brands. Nike markets its products under its own brand, as well as Nike Golf, Nike Pro, Nike+, Air Jordan, Nike Blazers, Air Force 1, Nike Dunk, Air Max, Foamposite, Nike Skateboarding, Nike CR7, and subsidiaries including Brand Jordan,

Hurley International and Converse. Globally, Nike sponsors many high-profile athletes, such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Rory McIlroy, LeBron James, and Roger Federer as well as sports teams like Barcelona, Manchester City, and Paris Saint-Germain.

Adidas AG is the largest sportswear manufacturer in Europe and is second only to [Nike](#) worldwide. Adidas is a multinational corporation, founded in 1949 and headquartered in Herzogenaurach, Germany, which designs and manufactures footwear, apparel, and accessories. The history of Adidas is rooted in the story of its founder, Adi Dassler in 1924. Dassler started the company that became Adidas with his brother Rudolf (Iglesias et al. 2020). The [Adidas Group owns several sporting brands](#), including Reebok, Taylor Made and Runtastic. Adidas also owns a sub-brand: adidas NEO which is targets to the young generation with social tools such as a social mirror and the opportunity to, literally, shop at the window with the touch of a button. The adidas brand offers apparel and footwear for every sport, every fashion, every style, whether you are an athlete or fashionista – according to the slogan “From the court to the catwalk and stadium to the street”. The company also owns a share of the German football club Bayern Munich. Adidas sponsors individual sports personalities like Lionel Messi and Damian Lillard and major organizations such as FIFA and UEFA competitions, the NBA and the Olympics. The company’s success can be ascribed to its attitude best summed up in the following words: “We do not know what the future in sports will bring but it will not stop us from shaping it. We will keep pushing the envelope with continuous innovations. And more importantly: we will make sure that we give you the tools you need to be the best athlete possible”. The company is working every day to inspire and enable people to harness the power of sport in their lives. The strategy translates that competence in sports into streetwear and fashion because sport is an attitude and a lifestyle (<https://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>, accessed on: 15 September 2020).

Puma was founded in 1924 and is headquartered in Herzogenaurach, Germany. Puma SE, together with its subsidiaries, designs, develops, sells, and markets footwear, apparel, and accessories. The company offers performance and sport-inspired lifestyle products in categories, such as football, cricket, running, training and fitness, golf, and motorsports. It also issues licenses to independent partners to design, develop, manufacture, and sell fragrances, eyewear, and watches. The company sells its products through Puma stores and factory outlets, as well as through online stores. Puma SE offers its products primarily under the Puma and Cobra Golf brand names. The company has a strategic partnership with Porsche (<https://www.equityrt.com>, accessed on: 30 September 2020).

Under Armour was founded in 1995 by Kevin Plank, a 23-year-old former captain of the University of Maryland football team. He noticed that the cotton T Shirts he and his teammates wore underneath their pads were always soaked with sweat making them become heavy. Plank created a T-Shirt built from microfibers that wicked moisture and kept athletes cool, dry and lightweight. Under Armour develops, markets, and distributes branded performance apparel, footwear, and accessories in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Asia-Pacific, and Latin America. The company offers its apparel in compression, fitted, and loose types to be worn in hot and cold. It also provides various footwear products for running, basketball, cleated sports, training, and outdoor. In addition, the company offers accessories, which include gloves, bags, and headwear. It primarily offers its products under the HEATGEAR, COLDGEAR, RUSH or RECOVER, UA Logo, UNDER ARMOUR, UA, ARMOUR, PROTECT THIS HOUSE, I WILL, ARMOURBOX, ARMOUR BRA, and ARMOUR FLEECE, as well as MyFitnessPal, MapMyFitness, and UNDER ARMOUR CONNECTED FITNESS brands. The company sells its products through wholesale channels, including national and regional sporting goods chains, independent and specialty retailers, department store chains, institutional athletic departments, and leagues and teams, as well as independent distributors; and directly to consumers through a network of brand and factory house stores, as well as through e-commerce websites. (Sandford 2016; <https://www.equityrt.com>, accessed on: 15 September 2020).

Lululemon Athletica Inc. was founded by Chip Wilson in Vancouver in Canada in 1998. The company started out on a very small scale with designs made exclusively for women practicing yoga. The company has extended its product offering to clothing for athletics and general fitness and now caters to men as well as women. The majority of the company’s stores are branded lululemon. The company currently has stores in North America, Europe, and the Asian Pacific region. As of February 2, 2020, it operated 491 company-operated stores under the lululemon and ivivva brands in countries such: the United States, Canada, the People's Republic of China, Australia, the United Kingdom, Japan, New Zealand, Germany, South Korea, Singapore, France, Malaysia, Sweden, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Switzerland (<https://www.equityrt.com>, accessed on: 30 September 2020).

Columbia Sportswear Company was founded in 1938 and is headquartered in Portland, Oregon. The company designs, sources, markets, and distributes outdoor, active, and everyday lifestyle apparel, footwear, accessories, and equipment in the United States, Latin America, the Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Canada. The company sales apparel, accessories, and equipment that are used in various activities, such as skiing, snowboarding, hiking, climbing, mountaineering, camping, hunting, fishing, trail running, water sports, yoga, golf, and adventure travel. It also offers footwear products that include lightweight hiking boots, trail running shoes, rugged cold weather boots for activities on snow and ice, sandals and shoes for use in water activities, and function-first fashion footwear and casual shoes for everyday use. The company sells its products

under the Columbia, Mountain Hard Wear, SOREL, and prAna brand names through the company owned network of branded and outlet retail stores, brand-specific e-commerce sites, and concession-based arrangements with third-parties at branded outlet and shop-in-shop retail locations, as well as through independently operated specialty outdoor and sporting goods stores, sporting goods chains, department store chains, Internet retailers, and international distributors (<https://www.equityrt.com>, accessed on: 30 September 2020).

Nike and Adidas were the [leading sportswear companies worldwide in 2019](#), generating combined revenues of over 65 billion U.S. dollars. UnderArmour Inc. was the third-largest sportswear company, but the company’s global revenue pales in comparison to its two bigger rivals: Adidas and Nike. Fellow German brand Puma, the fourth-largest sportswear company in the world, generates almost five times less revenue than Adidas. The more established brands are being challenged by Lululemon and Columbia Sportswear Company (Fig. 1.).

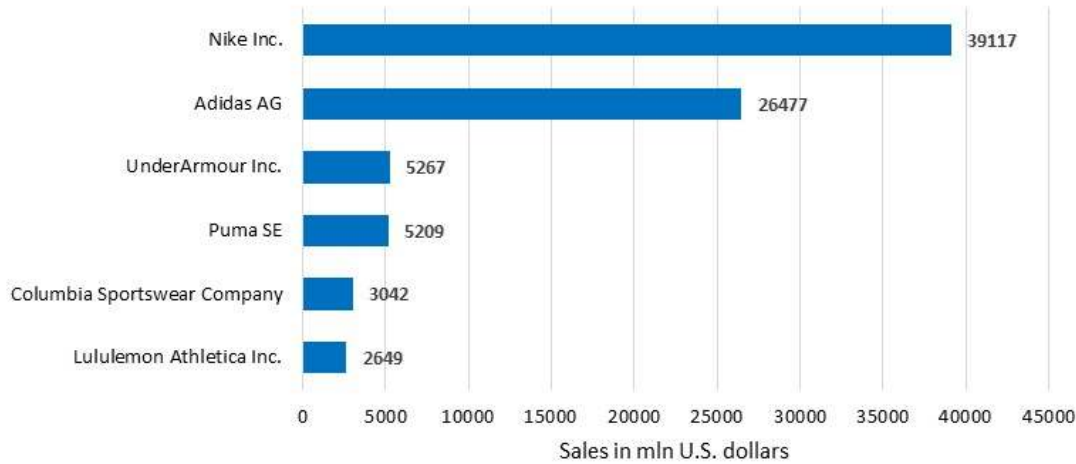


Fig. 1. Leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies worldwide in 2019, by sales (in million U.S. dollars)

Source: Statista 2020, <https://www.statista.com>; <https://www.macrotrends.net>(accessed on: 15 September 2020).

Taking sales revenues into account, Nike Inc. was the undisputed leader in the analyzed period. In 2019, it generated revenues of 39.117 million U.S. dollars. Compared to 2007, it grew nearly 2.5 times. Adidas AG ranked second in the analyzed period. These two companies clearly outran their rivals. However, Lululemon Athletica Inc. significantly strengthened its position on the market. Between 2007 and 2019, the value of its sales increased almost 18 times. It is an example of a company that managed to obtain a high position on the global market despite a relatively short time of operation (Fig. 2).

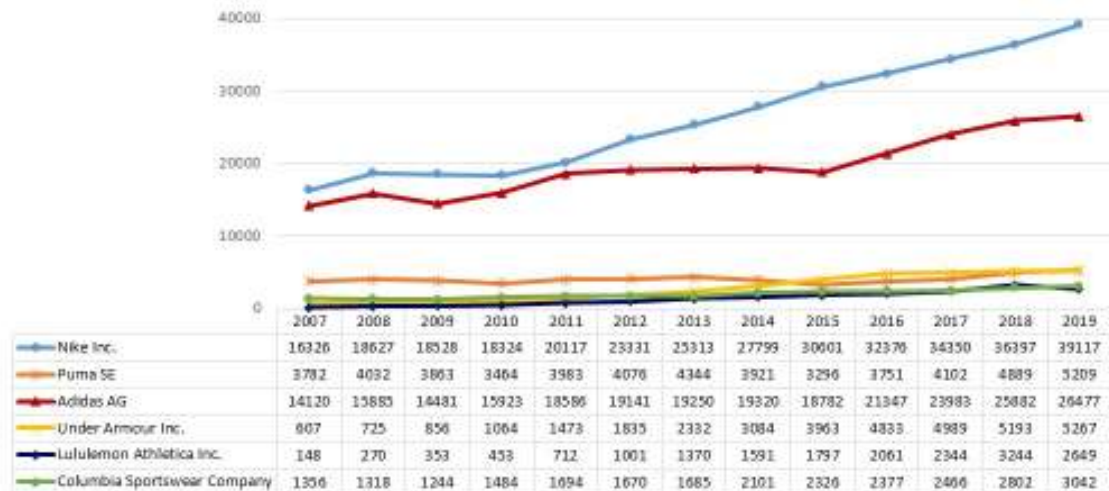


Fig. 2. Worldwide revenues of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies from 2007 to 2020 (in million U.S. dollars)

Source: own study based on: Statista 2020, <https://www.statista.com>; <https://www.macrotrends.net>(accessed on: 15 September 2020).

In the late 2019, the six largest sports corporations employed a total of 192,476 employees around the world. Compared to 2007, this number increased more than 2.5 times. The number of employees in each of the leading sportswear companies also reveals a disparity among those included in the study. With 76,700 employees worldwide, Nike Inc. was a leader in this respect. It was followed by Adidas AG, which had 59,533 employees. These two companies clearly outstripped their competitors: Lululemon Athletica Inc. (19,000), Puma SE (14,332), Under Armour Inc. (16,400) and Columbia Sportswear Company (6,511).

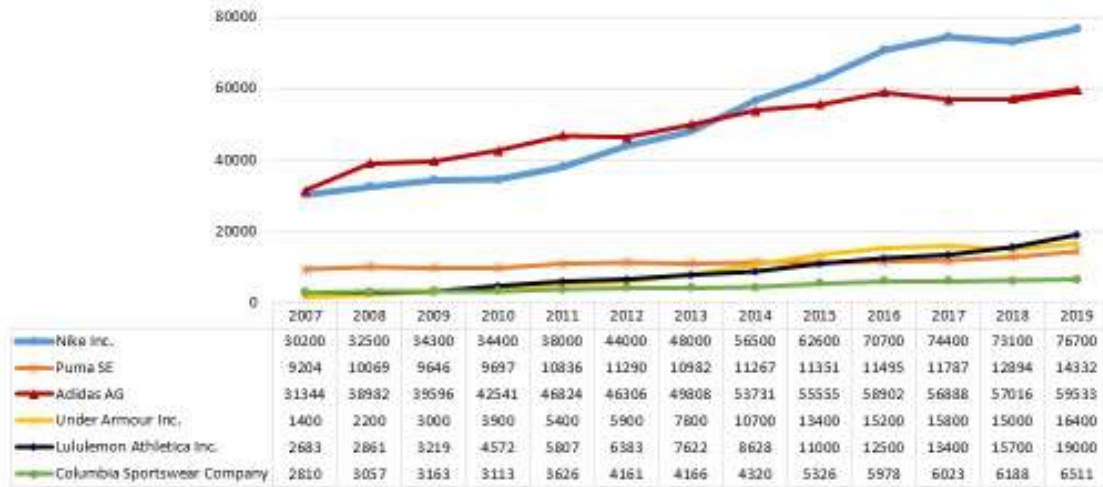


Fig. 3. Number of employees of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies worldwide from 2007 to 2020

Source: own study based on: Statista 2020, <https://www.statista.com>; Macrotrends, <https://www.macrotrends.net> (accessed on: 15 September 2020).

Among the analyzed companies, Nike was also the leader in terms of the value of the assets. At the end of 2019, the assets of this company were estimated at 23,717 million U.S. dollars, slightly ahead of Adidas AG with the assets of 22,733 million U.S. dollars. However, it should be pointed out that period Nike Inc. showed a much more dynamic growth in the value of assets in the analyzed.

These two companies clearly outran their rivals. Nevertheless, the most dynamic growth in the value of assets was reported for Lululemon Athletic Inc. Between 2007 and 2019, the value of the company's assets was as many as 17 times higher.

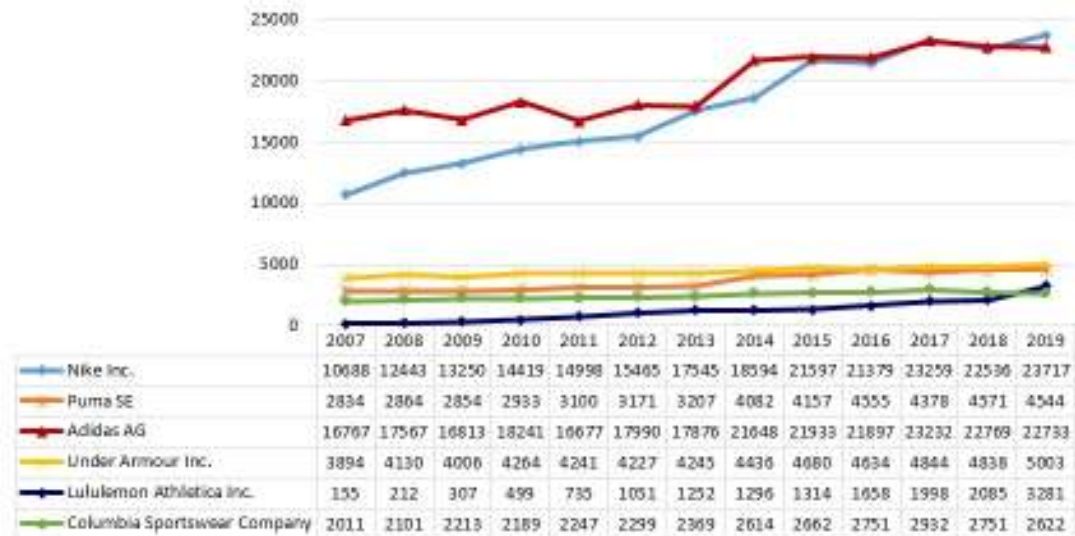


Fig. 4. Total assets of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies from 2007 to 2020 (in million U.S. dollars)

Source: own study based on: EquityRT, <https://www.equityrt.com> (accessed on: 30 September 2020).

Internationalization of leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies – Nike vs. Adidas

American Nike Inc. and German Adidas AG are excellent examples of a global-scale development of sports enterprises. High level of internationalization of their operations is reflected in the value of revenues generated outside their country of origin. Both Nike and Adidas generate a significant part of their revenues abroad.

Nike held the largest [market share of the global athletic apparel, accessories and footwear market](#) and generates revenue all over the world. The [North American region of Nike generated the largest portion of the company's revenue](#) with approximately 15.9 billion U.S. dollars in 2019. The [United States is a core market](#) for Nike, with the company generating approximately 41 percent of their overall revenue there in 2019. It follows that 59% of revenues are generated abroad (Fig. 5.).

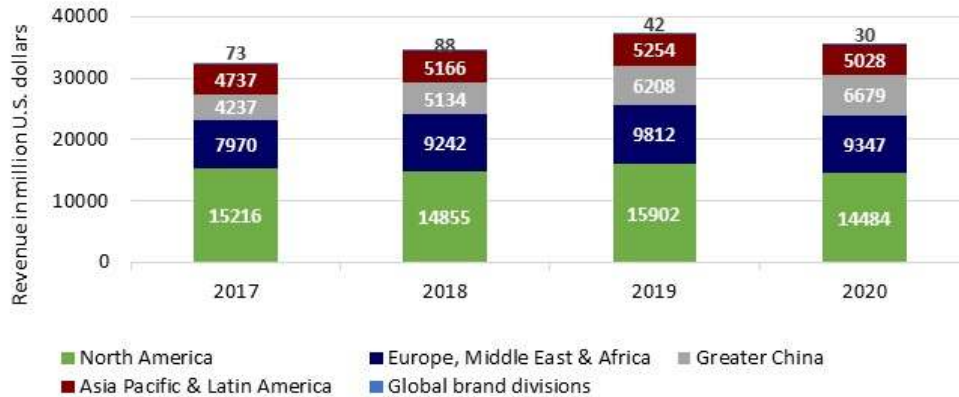


Fig. 5. Nike's revenue worldwide from 2017 to 2020, by region in million U.S. dollars

Source: adopted from Statista 2020, <https://www.statista.com>(accessed on: 15 September 2020).

Adidas is the second largest international sports company. Adidas first became known abroad in 1954, when the German national soccer team was wearing Adidas shoes with convertible cleats in the final match of the FIFA Soccer World Championship in Switzerland (Schmid et al. 2018). In 2019, the company [produced 448 million pairs of shoes worldwide](#) and [528 million units of sports apparel](#). As a result, Adidas has become one of the most popular brands amongst men and women when it comes to sportswear worldwide.

In 2019, the Asia-Pacific region generated most of the company's revenues (34%). Europe accounted for 26% of its revenues. Adidas also held a significant share of the U.S. sports market. In 2019, as much as 22% of its sales revenues were generated in the U.S. (Fig. 6.).



Fig. 7. Global distribution of Adidas retail net sales in 2019, by region

Source: adopted from Statista 2020, <https://www.statista.com>(accessed on: 15 September 2020).

Another parameter pointing to the high degree of internationalization of the leading athletic apparel and accessories makers is the number of retail stores they have around the world. Adidas AG excels in this respect. Moreover, between 2009 and 2019, it also maintained a relatively constant number of retail stores, i.e. 2,212 at the beginning of the analyzed period, rising to 2,533 in 2019.

A significant increase in this parameter may be seen in the case of Nike Inc. In the analyzed period, the number of retail stores worldwide increased 1.7 times, while the number of retail stores outside the U.S. grew 2.3 times (Fig. 7). This proves that the company strengthened its position, particularly outside its domestic market.



Fig. 7. Total number of Nike Inc. and Adidas AG retail stores from 2009 to 2020

Source: own study based on: Statista 2020, <https://www.statista.com>(accessed on: 28 September 2020).

To study the level of internationalization of the two largest international sports companies, one needs not only to analyze the parameters discussed above (the number of retail stores in the world and revenues generated in the respective regions of the world), but also the information presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Indicators for Adidas AG and Nike Inc. within the Analytical Database on Individual Multinationals and Affiliates (ADIMA)¹

Parent MNE	Number of Affiliates ^a	Number of Jurisdictions declared in Annual Reporting ^b	Number of Jurisdictions with a Physical Presence ^c	Number of Jurisdictions with Presence ^d	International Share (IS) ^e
Adidas AG	158	64	64	70	0,955696203
Nike Inc.	154	46	46	47	0,863636364

Explanations: ^aNumber of discovered affiliates for each MNE. A count of the number of affiliates in the Physical Register for each MNE; ^bCount of the number of jurisdictions declared within Annual Reporting for each MNE; ^cCount of the number of jurisdictions discovered with presence in the Physical Register for each MNE; ^d Count of the number of jurisdictions discovered with presence in either the Physical or Digital Register for each MNE; ^e Share of discovered affiliates in the Physical Register which the Jurisdiction of the Parent MNE for each MNE (Where IS(x,k) is the international share of the MNE x, which has jurisdiction in k, and xi represents the count of affiliates within jurisdiction i).

Source: OECD, The Analytical Database on Individual Multinationals and Affiliates (ADIMA) – ADIMA 500, <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/its/measuring-multinational-enterprises.htm> (accessed on: 24 September 2020).

Adidas AG has 158 affiliates physically present in 64 countries around the world, such as United States (Portland), Hong Kong, Canada (Toronto), Taiwan, England, Japan, Australia and Spain. The second-largest global player in the sports industry, Nike Inc., has 154 affiliates in 46 different countries. In both cases, affiliates were established as a result of greenfield investments and acquisitions. Adidas AG’s most important acquisitions include (Startup Ranking 2020): Runtastic (2015); Adams Golf (2012); Five Ten USA (2011); Textronics (2008); Mitchell & Ness (2007, sold in 2016); Reebok International² (2005); Salomon AG (1997, sold in 2005). In the case of Nike Inc., the following can be listed (Crunchbase 2020): TraceMe (2019); Colect (2019); Zodiac (2018); Umbro (2007, sold in 2012); Starter (2004, sold in 2007); Converse (2003); Hurley International (2002); Bauer Hockey (1994, sold in 2008); Cole Haan (1988, sold in 2013).

¹Understanding where MNEs are, how they operate, and where they pay taxes is crucial for sound policy making and sound macro-economic statistics. However little official statistics are currently available on individual MNEs. To fill this gap the OECD has begun to develop a new database – the Analytical Database on Individual Multinationals and Affiliates (ADIMA) – using a number of open big data sources that can provide new insights on individual MNEs and their global profiles.

²The acquisition of Reebok also allowed Adidas to compete with Nike worldwide as the number two athletic shoemaker in the world.

The importance of capital internationalization in building the international market position may be further proved by the fact that Nike Inc. and Adidas AG, as the only leading athletic apparel, accessories and footwear companies, are among the world's largest corporations listed in the Fortune Global 500³ (Fig. 8.). Nike Inc. has been present in the ranking since 1998, with breaks in 2000-2004, 2007 and 2011-2012. Adidas AG did not enter the list until 2018.

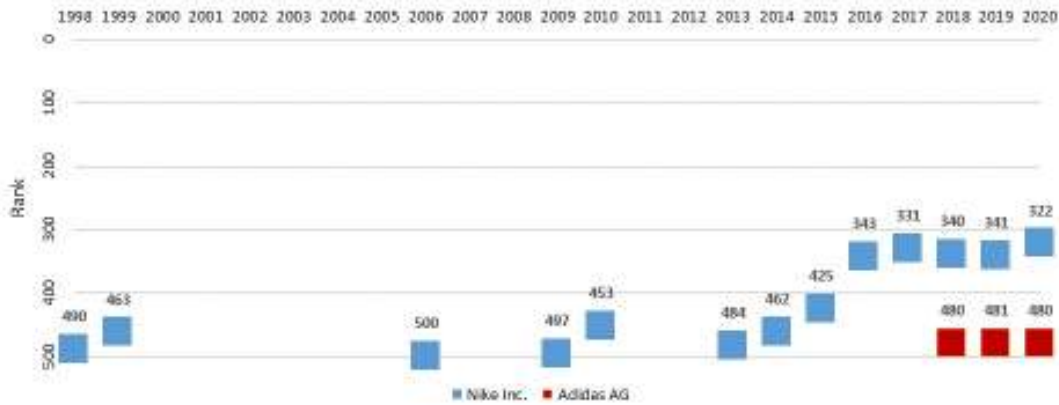


Fig.8.The position of Nike Inc. and Adidas AG on the Fortune Global 500 from 1998 to 2020

Source: own study based on: Fortune Global 500, <https://fortune.com> (accessed on: 12 September 2020).

Their growing market position, achieved among others through internationalization, is also evidenced by the value of the basic brands of these two sports giants, i.e. the Nike brand and Adidas brand. As of 2019, Nike was the most valuable global apparel brand, with a brand value of over 32 billion U.S. dollars (Fig. 10.).

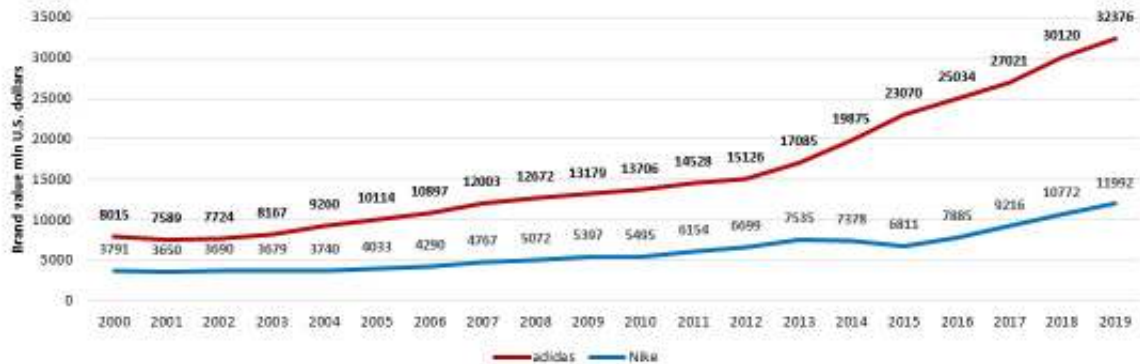


Fig. 10. Best Global Sporting Goods Brands

Source: own study based on: Best Global Brands 2019, Interbrand, www.interbrand.com (accessed on: 30 August 2020).

Discussion

The enterprises discussed in the article, leading global companies in the athletic apparel and accessories market, have internationalized their business operations for many years, placing their capital all over the world, both through greenfield investments and acquisitions. As many other MNEs, they have been doing it by means of foreign direct investments (FDI), with the ultimate goal to increase their capital efficiency and company value. Expanding into international markets has been a factor in building their international competitiveness and succeeding on the global market (Jaworek et al. 2018; Szałucka 2015; Szałucka 2010). It is a path towards expanding the company's sales market while creating demand on a global scale, benefiting additionally from the already gained competitive advantages and building new ones based on the use of tangible and intangible resources scattered around the world, such as knowledge, skills, sources of information, not to mention the benefits from cultural diversity. The division of FDI drivers, often cited in the scientific literature on the subject,

³ Fortune Global 500 provides an overview of worldwide businesses and ranks the world's largest companies. In a growing global economy, this list provides information on the largest revenue producing companies around the globe. The world's 500 largest companies generated 33.3 trillion U.S. dollars in revenues and 2.1 trillion U.S. dollars in profits in 2019. Together, this year's Fortune Global 500 companies employ 69.9 million people worldwide and are represented by 32 countries.

recognizes four groups of them: resource-oriented, market-oriented, effectiveness-oriented and capital-oriented (strategic assets). J.H. Dunning was the precursor of this division (Dunning 1993; Dunning &Lundan 2008; Jaworek et al. 2019). Undoubtedly, when undertaking FDIs, the MNEs operating in the athletic apparel and accessories market focus on motives related to resources, effectiveness and market. This can be clearly seen in the information provided by Adidas AG in its last Annual Reports (<https://report.adidas-group.com>, accessed on: 15 September 2020), which show the scale of the company's production links and capital commitment in the world, particularly visible in the Asian market (mainly in China, Cambodia and Vietnam). Through this commitment, Adidas seeks to ensure competitive pricing by reducing costs, in which Asia, a continent with the largest population, certainly plays a significant role.

Conclusions

The global sportswear market is a lucrative market, which is forecast to grow further in the coming years. Nike and Adidas are the most prominent producers within this market worldwide, but the companies also hold the honor of being the world's leading globalists on the athletic market. Puma, Under Armour, Lululemon and Columbia Sportswear are some of Nike's and Adidas main competitors. All the studied companies strengthened their market position in the analyzed period, as measured based on their sales revenues, value of assets and number of employees. Taking Nike Inc. and Adidas AG as an example, one can argue that international expansion, leading to the company's further internationalization, constitutes a factor in building its international competitiveness and succeeding on the global market.

The subject of this article responds to the need for a broader presentation of the economization of sport (Lis & Tomanek 2020). One of the important aspects of the development of the sports business is its internationalization. The experience of the companies presented in this article has not only a cognitive value but also practical applications. It shows the paths that have led them to success through expanding into international markets.

Conflicts of interest – The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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