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Extended Abstract



How do multinationals address Grand Challenges? Mapping the literature

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Objectives

This study investigates how Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) engage with Grand Challenges (GC) through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While prior literature has explored MNEs' contributions to grand challenges (GC), there remains limited understanding of the mechanisms through which these GC are operationalized. The objective is to map and systematize the literature on MNEs' engagement with GC and SDGs, offering a framework that categorizes their strategies across modes of engagement, spatial contexts, and domains of influence.

Data and Methods

We conducted a bibliometric and interpretative review of 71 articles published between 2015 and 2024 in leading international business, management, and organization journals. The sample was selected using SDG-related keywords and screened for relevance to MNEs' active roles in addressing GC. Quantitative analysis classified articles by GC attributes (type, configuration, spatial scale, and locus), while qualitative coding identified engagement mechanisms such as global value chains (GVC), public-private partnerships (PPP), and political corporate social responsibility (PCSR).

Results

The literature reveals a growing but fragmented body of work, with a bias toward economic GC and limited attention to environmental challenges. Most studies focus on host-country

interventions, with few addressing home-country or global strategies. MNEs engage with GC through distinct mechanisms: GVCs promote internal sustainability and social equity; PPPs facilitate collaborative solutions in healthcare, education, and infrastructure; and PCSR enables advocacy and policy influence. These mechanisms operate across spatial contexts and target societal, environmental, and economic domains. The framework developed consolidates these dimensions, offering a structured lens to understand MNEs' operational strategies.

Conclusions

MNEs are positioned as key agents in addressing GC through SDG-aligned strategies. This study contributes to international business and non-market strategy literature by clarifying how MNEs enact solutions beyond market activities. It highlights the need for integrated approaches, broader theoretical perspectives, and attention to underrepresented regions, industries, and digital MNEs. Future research should explore long-term impacts, negative externalities, and financing roles to deepen understanding of MNEs' societal influence.

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