

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Academic Report

Stakeholder Engagement in the Launch of the ConnectPlus Platform

Student: Carla Cristina Lima De Carvalho Toldo

Student ID: 2419228

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Lecturer: Aso Abdullah

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1. Executive Summary

This report critically analyses stakeholder engagement strategies for the launch of BritMart Global's 'ConnectPlus' digital loyalty platform within the UK market. By applying established analytical frameworks, including Mendelow's Matrix and the Salience Model, this study identifies and categorises internal and external stakeholders, proposing robust engagement strategies utilising the SWANS/OWANS and 4Cs models to foster collaboration, mitigate risks, and build trust.

Furthermore, the report critically evaluates the ethical implications inherent in AI-powered recommendations and assesses the profound impact of sustainable stakeholder engagement on overall business performance. The conclusions emphasise that a strategic and ethical approach to stakeholder engagement is not merely beneficial, but essential for project success, long-term sustainability, and corporate reputation. Actionable recommendations are provided to guide project management and ensure responsible AI governance.

2. Introduction

BritMart Global, a leading UK retail and e-commerce organisation, is launching 'ConnectPlus,' a digital loyalty platform incorporating AI-powered recommendations, mobile rewards, and data-driven insights (Ashcroft, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2021). This initiative aims to revolutionise the customer experience, strengthen engagement, and enhance retention across diverse markets.

From the perspective of the Project Manager, effective stakeholder identification, analysis, and engagement are critical determinants for the successful design, launch, and widespread adoption of ConnectPlus. Ensuring that stakeholders remain engaged, informed, and aligned throughout the project lifecycle is paramount to mitigating resistance and facilitating smooth implementation (Johnson et al., 2020; PMI, 2022). This report systematically analyses ConnectPlus stakeholders by applying relevant engagement theories and frameworks, with the objective of proposing evidence-based strategies for managing divergent interests and expectations, thereby ensuring a sustainable and ethically sound launch. Given the project's multicultural complexity and international scope, an adaptable and culturally sensitive approach is necessitated to effectively mitigate risks and maximise cross-functional collaboration.

3. SMART Objectives

SMART objectives (Johnson et al., 2020) provide a structured framework to guide the development and launch of the ConnectPlus platform. The specific objective is to launch in five key international markets within six months, with a clear focus on digital customer experience and personalisation. Measurably, the project targets two million active users and a 15% increase in average order value (AOV) within 12 months post-launch, driven by AI-powered recommendations.

This is achievable by leveraging BritMart Global's existing cloud infrastructure and established AI partnerships, which ensure technical stability and scalability. The project is highly relevant, as ConnectPlus directly aligns with BritMart Global's long-term strategic goal of becoming the most customer-centric UK retailer, thereby strengthening loyalty and retention. The objective is time-bound, with a global rollout and initial performance evaluation scheduled for December 2026, allowing for continuous adjustments based on stakeholder feedback and measurable performance indicators.

4. Stakeholder Identification & Mapping

The success of the ConnectPlus project fundamentally depends on the effective identification and systematic engagement of its stakeholders. Stakeholder analysis is a crucial process for understanding who the individuals or groups are that can affect or be affected by the project, and how their interests and influence should be managed (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Agle et al., 2022). For this project, Mendelow's Matrix and the Salience Model are employed to systematically categorise and prioritise stakeholders. This is followed by a SWOT analysis specifically tailored to evaluate their respective interests and potential impacts.

4.1. Mendelow's Matrix (Power/Interest Matrix)

Mendelow's Matrix (Mendelow, 1981) is a strategic tool that classifies stakeholders based on their level of power (the ability to influence the project) and interest (the level of concern with the project's outcome). This matrix divides stakeholders into four quadrants, each requiring a distinct engagement strategy. For the ConnectPlus project, the application of Mendelow's Matrix reveals the following categorisation:

Quadrant	High Power / High Interest	High Power / Low Interest	Low Power / High Interest	Low Power / Low Interest
Strategy	Manage Closely	Keep Satisfied	Keep Informed	Monitor
Stakeholders	Board of Directors, Senior Leadership Team, Core Project Team (IT, Marketing, Sales), Key Customers, Data Protection Regulators	Shareholders (focusing on financial return), Trade Unions, Technology Partners (e.g., AI providers)	General Customers, Media, Consumer Associations, Customer Support Teams, Competitors	Low-impact Suppliers, Local Community (not directly affected), General Public

Analysis: The application of Mendelow's Matrix to the ConnectPlus project reveals a clear stratification of stakeholder engagement priorities. The 'Manage Closely' quadrant demands continuous, transparent, and collaborative engagement, as these stakeholders possess both the authority to allocate resources and the vested interest to drive project success. Conversely, the 'Monitor' quadrant requires minimal but consistent attention to detect any shifts in perception. The limitation of this model, however, is its static nature; stakeholder positions can shift dynamically throughout the project lifecycle, necessitating regular reassessment (Johnson et al., 2020).

4.2. Salience Model

The Salience Model, proposed by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), offers a more refined approach to stakeholder identification and prioritisation, based on three attributes: Power, Legitimacy, and Urgency. The combination of these attributes results in different types of stakeholders, each requiring varying levels of attention and engagement.

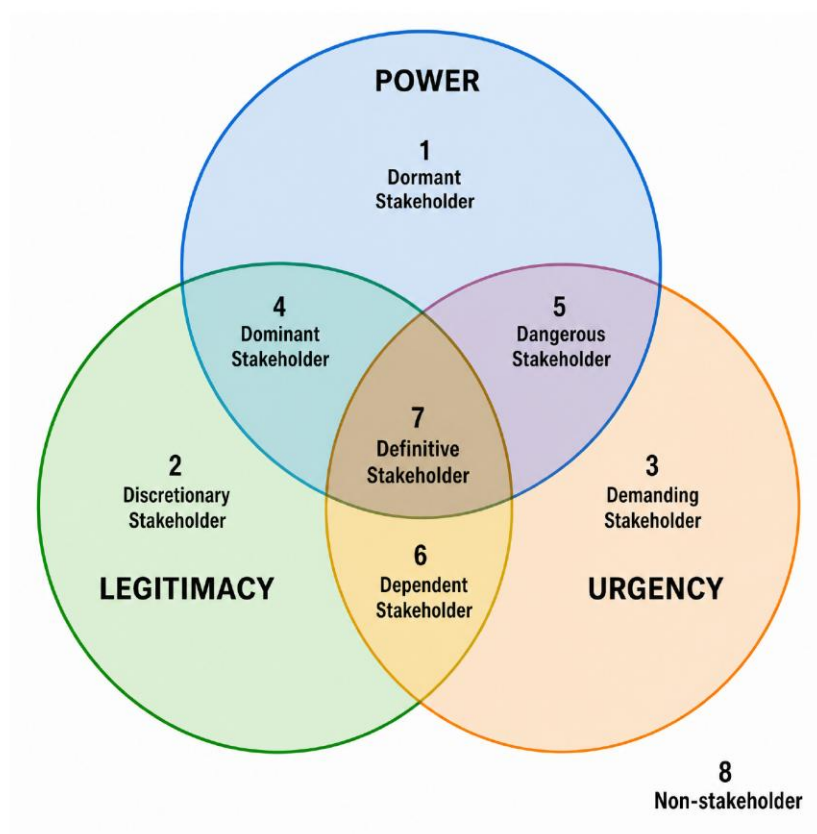


Figure 1: Stakeholder Typology based on a Diagnostic of up to Three Attributes: Perceived Power, Legitimacy and Urgency (Mitchell, Agle, Wood, 1997)

	Attributes	Description and Implications for ConnectPlus
Definitive Stakeholders	Power, Legitimacy, Urgency	These stakeholders possess all three attributes and are the most critical. For ConnectPlus, this includes the Board of Directors, Senior Leadership Team, and Core Project Team. They must be actively involved in decision-making and their concerns addressed promptly.
Dependent Stakeholders	Legitimacy, Urgency (lack Power)	These stakeholders have legitimate claims and urgent needs but lack the power to enforce them. Examples include General Customers and Consumer Associations. BritMart Global must actively listen to their feedback and integrate their needs into the platform's development.
Dangerous Stakeholders	Power, Urgency (lack Legitimacy)	These stakeholders have power and urgent claims but lack legitimacy. This could potentially include competitors engaging in aggressive marketing tactics. Their power and urgency demand careful monitoring and strategic responses to mitigate potential harm.

Dominant Stakeholders	Power, Legitimacy (lack Urgency)	These stakeholders have both power and legitimate claims but their issues are not urgent. Shareholders and Technology Partners fall into this category. They need to be kept informed and satisfied, ensuring their long-term interests are aligned with the project's success.
Demanding Stakeholders	Urgency (lack Power, Legitimacy)	These stakeholders have urgent claims but lack power and legitimacy. This might include isolated customer complaints. While their urgency might demand attention, they should be monitored, but not necessarily prioritised over other stakeholder groups.
Discretionary Stakeholders	Legitimacy (lack Power, Urgency)	These stakeholders have legitimate claims but lack power and urgency. This could include the Local Community or NGOs. Engagement with them is often discretionary, driven by ethical considerations or a desire to enhance corporate reputation.
Dormant Stakeholders	Power (lack Legitimacy, Urgency)	These stakeholders possess power but lack legitimacy and urgency. This might include a large institutional investor. Their power means they have the potential to become more influential, so they should be monitored.

By applying the Saliency Model, BritMart Global can strategically prioritise its engagement efforts, thereby allocating resources more effectively to stakeholders who are most critical to the success of the ConnectPlus platform. This nuanced understanding allows for tailored communication and engagement strategies, ensuring that the right stakeholders are addressed with the appropriate level of attention at the right time.

4.3. SWOT Analysis of ConnectPlus Launch

A SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the internal and external factors that can influence the success of the ConnectPlus platform launch (Johnson et al., 2020).

Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
Strong brand reputation of BritMart Global	Potential for internal resistance to change
Existing large customer base	Complexity of integrating new AI technologies
Advanced AI-driven personalization capabilities	High initial investment and operational costs
Dedicated and experienced project team	Dependence on third-party technology partners

Opportunities (External)	Threats (External)
Growing demand for personalized customer experiences	Intense competition in the e-commerce loyalty market
Expansion into new international markets	Evolving data privacy regulations (e.g., GDPR, CCPA)
Strategic partnerships with technology providers	Cybersecurity risks and data breaches
Leveraging big data for market insights	Negative public perception of AI and data usage

Analysis: BritMart Global's SWOT reveals strong internal assets (brand, AI) for market opportunities (personalised experiences). However, internal weaknesses (integration complexity, costs) and external threats (competition, data privacy) demand careful strategic planning and robust risk management. Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for navigating these challenges and maximising project potential.

4.4. PESTLE Analysis

A PESTLE analysis examines the external macro-environmental factors that can influence the ConnectPlus project (Johnson et al., 2020).

Factor	Description and Impact on ConnectPlus
Political	Government stability, trade policies, and regulatory frameworks (e.g., consumer protection laws, data privacy regulations like GDPR). These factors directly impact market entry, operational compliance, and data handling for ConnectPlus in various international markets.
Economic	Economic growth rates, inflation, exchange rates, and consumer purchasing power. A strong economy can boost consumer spending on loyalty programmes, while economic downturns may reduce engagement. Exchange rates affect profitability in international markets.
Social	Demographic trends, cultural norms, lifestyle changes, and consumer attitudes towards technology and privacy. The success of ConnectPlus depends on understanding and adapting to diverse social preferences for personalised experiences and concerns about data usage across different regions.
Technological	Advancements in AI, mobile technology, data analytics, and cybersecurity. These offer opportunities for enhancing platform features and efficiency but also pose challenges in keeping up with rapid innovation and ensuring robust security measures.

Legal

Laws related to data protection, consumer rights, intellectual property, and e-commerce.

Compliance with the legal landscape in each operating country is critical to avoid penalties and maintain trust, especially concerning AI-driven personalisation.

Environmental

Growing consumer and regulatory pressure for sustainable business practices and corporate social responsibility. While less direct for a digital platform, BritMart Global's overall environmental image can influence brand perception and customer loyalty, indirectly affecting ConnectPlus adoption.

Analysis: The PESTLE analysis reveals that ConnectPlus operates in a highly complex external environment. Political and legal factors, especially data privacy, pose significant compliance challenges. Economic conditions influence market reception, while social trends dictate demand for personalised services. Technological advancements offer innovation but demand constant adaptation. BritMart Global must proactively monitor these factors to adjust strategy and ensure long-term sustainability.

5. Roles and Responsibilities of Key Stakeholders

Understanding stakeholder roles, responsibilities, benefits, and challenges is crucial for ConnectPlus's launch, informing engagement strategies to maximise support and minimise resistance.

Stakeholder Group	Key Stakeholders	Roles & Responsibilities	Benefits to ConnectPlus
Internal	Product Development Team	Platform conception, maintenance, technical expertise.	Technical stability, innovation.
Internal	Marketing Team	Promotion, customer acquisition, market strategy.	Brand awareness, customer reach.
Internal	Sales Team	Customer adoption, direct feedback.	User growth, market insights.
Internal	Senior Leadership/Board of Directors	Strategic vision, resource allocation.	Authority, strategic alignment.
External	Customers	End-users, provide revenue and feedback.	Revenue, user insights.
External	Technology Partners	Specialised expertise, innovative solutions.	Technical support, innovation.
External	Regulators & Government Bodies	Ensure compliance, legal assurance.	Legal compliance, trust.

6. Stakeholder Engagement Process and Conflict Management

Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for ConnectPlus's successful launch. This systematic process identifies, analyses, plans, and implements actions to ensure support and

minimise resistance. Conflict management, requiring proactive and reactive strategies, is integral to keeping the project on track.

6.1. Approaches and Models for Stakeholder Engagement

To effectively engage stakeholders, a combination of frameworks and models will be used. Furthermore, specific engagement tactics will be deployed for different stakeholder groups:

Stakeholder Group	Engagement Method	Description / Purpose
Customers	Surveys	Regular surveys to gather feedback on features, UX, and satisfaction. Understand needs and privacy concerns.
Customers	Pilot Testing	Pilot program in selected markets for early user insights. Test new functionalities before full rollout.
Customers	Feedback Forms	Accessible forms within app/website for suggestions and issue reporting. Direct feedback channel.
Customers	Mobile App Reviews	Monitoring and responding to app store reviews. Gauge customer sentiment and identify improvement areas.
Internal Teams	Weekly Project Meetings	Regular meetings for alignment on progress, challenges, and next steps. Ensure alignment and reduce conflicts.
Internal Teams	Training Sessions	Comprehensive training on new platform functionalities and benefits. Equip teams with necessary knowledge.

Internal Teams	RACI Charts	Define roles and responsibilities. Reduce ambiguity, improve coordination.
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Internal Teams	Progress Reports	Regular reports on milestones and performance metrics. Maintain transparency.
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Beyond these specific tactics, a combination of established frameworks and models will be used:

1. Stakeholder Matrix (Power/Interest Grid): Guides engagement planning by categorising stakeholders based on power and interest (Mendelow, 1981).
2. Stakeholder Typology: Refines prioritisation by classifying stakeholders based on Power, Legitimacy, and Urgency (Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997).
3. SWANS and OWANS Analysis: Understanding stakeholders' positions as Supporters (SWANS) or Opponents (OWANS) facilitates personalised strategies (Stewart-Lord et al., 2022).
4. RACI Matrix: Clearly defines roles and responsibilities (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) for project deliverables (Johnson et al., 2020).
5. 4C's Model: Emphasises Communication, Collaboration, Consultation, and Commitment — detailed below.

6.2. The 4C Model of Stakeholder Engagement

The 4C Model is a critical stakeholder engagement framework that structures the relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders around four interdependent pillars:

Communication, Consultation, Collaboration, and Commitment. Given the complexity of the ConnectPlus global launch, this model is essential to move beyond transactional interactions and build a trust-based ecosystem. It provides a practical and structured approach to ensure that all stakeholder groups are engaged in a meaningful, consistent, and ethical manner throughout the project lifecycle (Christopher, Payne and Ballantyne, 2013).

Pillar	Definition	Application to ConnectPlus
Communication	The clear, timely, and transparent sharing of information with all stakeholder groups through appropriate channels.	Regular project updates via newsletters, dashboards, and town halls for internal teams; targeted campaigns and in-app notifications for customers; formal reports for regulators and shareholders. Communication is tailored to the audience and delivered consistently throughout the project lifecycle.
Consultation	The active solicitation of stakeholder input, feedback, and perspectives before key decisions are made.	Structured focus groups with customers prior to feature releases; workshops with the IT and Marketing teams during platform design; regulatory pre-consultation meetings to ensure GDPR compliance before launch. Consultation ensures that decisions reflect the needs and concerns of those affected.

Collaboration	The joint working and co-creation of solutions between the organisation and its stakeholders, going beyond mere information exchange.	Cross-functional project teams integrating IT, Marketing, Sales, and Customer Support; co-development sessions with AI technology partners; pilot programmes in selected markets where customers actively shape platform features. Collaboration transforms stakeholders from passive recipients into active contributors.
Commitment	The demonstration of sustained, genuine dedication to stakeholder interests, building trust and long-term relationships.	Publicly stated ethical AI principles and data privacy guarantees; transparent reporting on project milestones and challenges; long-term loyalty rewards and community programmes for customers; ongoing compliance monitoring for regulators. Commitment signals that BritMart Global views stakeholder engagement as a long-term strategic priority, not a one-off exercise.

The 4C Model is particularly valuable for the ConnectPlus launch because it moves stakeholder engagement beyond a transactional, compliance-driven exercise and towards a relational, trust-based approach. When all four pillars are applied consistently, they create a virtuous cycle: effective Communication builds awareness; Consultation generates buy-in; Collaboration produces better outcomes; and Commitment sustains the relationship over time. This integrated approach is essential for a project of this scale and complexity, operating across multiple international markets with diverse stakeholder expectations.

6.3. Conflict Management

Conflicts are inevitable in complex and multicultural projects. As Project Manager, my approach will be proactive and focused on constructive resolution:

- **Early Identification:** Continuous monitoring of stakeholder interactions and feedback to identify signs of conflict in early stages.
- **Open Communication:** Creating an environment where stakeholders feel comfortable expressing concerns and disagreements.
- **Mediation and Negotiation:** Acting as an impartial mediator, facilitating discussions and seeking win-win solutions.
- **Focus on Interests, Not Positions:** Instead of focusing on rigid stakeholder positions, attention will be directed to underlying interests.
- **Strategic Escalation:** In cases of persistent or high-impact conflicts, escalation to senior leadership will be done strategically.
- **Documentation:** All conflicts and their resolutions will be documented for future learning and to ensure transparency.

7. Impact of Sustainable Stakeholder Engagement on Business Performance

Sustainable stakeholder engagement transcends mere expectation management and positions itself as a strategic driver for business performance, especially in the context of the global launch of the ConnectPlus platform. The proactive and continuous integration of stakeholders' interests and concerns can generate a series of tangible and intangible benefits that drive the organisation's long-term success.

Improved Reputation and Trust: Transparent and ethical engagement builds a solid corporate reputation. The trust generated translates into increased customer loyalty, talent attraction, and a favourable brand perception, which is crucial for penetrating new international markets.

Risk and Cost Reduction: Early stakeholder involvement identifies and mitigates risks, preventing fines, delays, and rework. Proactive consultation with regulators and customer feedback reduces costs associated with crises, litigation, and project failures.

Innovation and Competitive Advantage: Broad stakeholder engagement fosters innovation, providing ideas and insights for new functionalities and process improvements. This collaboration ensures ConnectPlus remains competitive by meeting diverse market needs.

Increased Operational Efficiency: Engaged employees, aligned with ConnectPlus objectives, boost productivity and morale. Supplier and partner engagement optimises the supply chain and improves coordination for smoother operations.

Access to Capital and Sustainable Growth: Strong stakeholder engagement and CSR enhance investment attractiveness, facilitating access to capital. A business model prioritising stakeholder well-being fosters resilience and sustainable long-term growth.

Enhanced Decision-Making: Diverse perspectives in decision-making lead to more informed, robust, and sustainable choices. Considering impacts on various stakeholder groups is crucial for ConnectPlus, operating in a complex global environment requiring culturally resonant decisions.

8. Challenges and Ethical Considerations in Stakeholder Engagement

While sustainable stakeholder engagement offers numerous advantages, it also presents significant challenges and ethical considerations that require critical attention. A primary challenge involves conflicting stakeholder interests. For instance, customer demands for personalised experiences often clash with data protection regulations (e.g., GDPR) and privacy concerns. Reconciling these divergent interests necessitates careful negotiation, transparent communication, and a robust ethical framework (Crane and Matten, 2016).

Another issue is the resource intensity of comprehensive engagement across diverse international markets, demanding substantial time, financial, and human resources. Effective prioritisation, guided by models like the Salience Model, is crucial to allocate resources efficiently without neglecting important stakeholders.

Ethical considerations are paramount, particularly concerning ConnectPlus's AI-powered personalisation features. The use of AI raises concerns about algorithmic bias, data privacy, and transparency (Gligor et al., 2025; Puntoni et al., 2021). BritMart Global must ensure responsible AI deployment, adhering to ethical principles including:

- **Data Privacy:** Implementing robust data protection measures and ensuring compliance with international data privacy laws (e.g., GDPR, CCPA). Customers require clear information and consent options regarding data collection and usage.
- **Algorithmic Transparency:** Striving for explainability in AI-driven recommendations, allowing customers to understand the rationale behind suggestions.
- **Fairness and Bias Mitigation:** Actively identifying and mitigating biases in AI algorithms to prevent discriminatory outcomes. Regular audits and ethical reviews are essential.

Finally, the management of expectations remains a continuous challenge. Clear and realistic communication about the project's capabilities and limitations is vital to maintain credibility and prevent erosion of trust. Despite these challenges, sustainable stakeholder engagement remains a critical business strategy, contributing to resilience, innovation, and profitability for the ConnectPlus platform in a dynamic global market.

9. Recommendations and Conclusion

The launch of the ConnectPlus platform represents a strategic milestone for the company in the retail and e-commerce sector, with the potential to transform the customer experience and drive global growth. However, the success of this endeavour is intrinsically linked to the ability to effectively identify, analyse, and engage a wide range of stakeholders, both internal and external. The analyses presented in this report highlight the complexity and criticality of stakeholder engagement and conflict management in a diverse market context.

9.1. Recommendations

To ensure the continued success of the ConnectPlus platform and optimise stakeholder engagement, I propose the following recommendations:

1. **Develop a Dynamic Engagement Plan:** The stakeholder engagement plan should be a living document, regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in the project environment and stakeholder needs. This includes periodic re-evaluation of power/interest and salience matrices.
2. **Invest in Training and Capacity Building:** Project teams, especially those in direct contact with stakeholders in international markets, should receive continuous training in intercultural communication, negotiation, and conflict management.
3. **Create Robust Feedback Channels:** Establish multiple channels for stakeholders to provide feedback and express concerns. This may include regular surveys, online discussion forums, open meetings, and a grievance system.
4. **Transparent and Consistent Communication:** All stakeholders should be kept informed about project progress, challenges, and important decisions. Communication should be tailored to the audience, using clear language and preferred channels for each group.
5. **Foster Collaboration and Co-creation:** Opportunities should be sought to involve stakeholders in the co-creation and decision-making process, especially in areas where their expertise can add significant value.
6. **Continuous Monitoring and Impact Assessment:** Clear metrics should be implemented to monitor the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement strategies and assess their impact on project performance and business outcomes.
7. **Develop Conflict Mitigation Strategies:** In addition to reactive management, proactive strategies should be developed to anticipate and mitigate potential conflicts, especially in markets with distinct cultural or regulatory sensitivities.

9.2. Conclusion

Stakeholder engagement is more than a task, it is a management philosophy that permeates all phases of the project lifecycle. For ConnectPlus, sustainable and strategic engagement with its stakeholders will not only ensure the successful launch of the platform but also strengthen its position in the global market, build organisational resilience, and drive continuous innovation. By adopting the proposed recommendations, the company will be well-positioned to transform challenges into opportunities, solidifying its role as a leader in international retail and e-commerce and reaping the benefits of a lasting and mutually beneficial relationship with all its interest groups.

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