

Does Diplomatic Influence Pay? A Gravity Model Estimation of the Effect of Morocco's Soft Power Assets on its Bilateral Trade Volumes in Africa

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Abstract

This study investigates whether Morocco's soft power assets (cultural, religious, economic, and diplomatic influence) translate into tangible economic benefits in the form of increased bilateral trade with African partners. Using an augmented gravity model of trade estimated with Poisson Pseudo-Maximum Likelihood (PPML) for a panel of 45 African countries over the period 2010–2024, we quantify the impact of various soft power proxies on Morocco's trade flows. The results indicate that soft-power instruments, particularly cultural diplomacy, religious ties, and active peacekeeping contributions, exert a statistically significant and economically meaningful positive effect on trade volumes, even after controlling for traditional gravity determinants such as GDP, distance, and colonial links. The findings suggest that Morocco's deliberate soft-power strategy in Africa is not merely a political tool but also a viable economic diplomacy that can enhance regional trade integration. Policy implications include the continued investment in soft-power channels as a complement to traditional trade liberalization measures.

Keywords: Soft power, gravity model, Morocco, Africa, bilateral trade, economic diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, panel data.

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1. Introduction

In an era where geopolitical influence is increasingly exercised through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion, the concept of "soft power" has become a critical instrument of statecraft. Nations strategically deploy cultural, religious, and diplomatic assets to shape preferences, build alliances, and secure economic advantages. Morocco, a middle power with profound historical and cultural linkages across the African continent, has emerged as a paradigmatic case of this approach. It has systematically cultivated a soft power portfolio, spanning religious diplomacy, cultural outreach, peacekeeping contributions, and economic partnerships, to bolster its stature as a regional leader. This investment in influence, reflected in its consistent ranking as the third most influential country in Africa and 50th globally in the 2025 Global Soft Power Index, prompts a pivotal empirical question: does this meticulously built soft power translate into measurable economic returns? Specifically, to what extent does Morocco's soft power asset portfolio enhance its bilateral trade volumes with other African nations?

While the determinants of Morocco's international trade have been explored through traditional gravity models, which typically emphasize economic mass and geographic distance, existing literature offers limited insight into the role of intangible, persuasive forces. Studies such as those by Bouya & Lechheb (2024), which use a spatial gravity model to analyze trade dynamics from 2010 to 2020, have advanced the field but have not explicitly integrated proxies for soft power. Similarly, other gravity model applications, including recent augmented models examining Morocco's exports up to 2023, have focused on conventional trade determinants. This constitutes a significant gap, as it overlooks a potentially vital mechanism through which Morocco fosters commercial integration. This paper directly addresses that lacuna by constructing and estimating an augmented gravity model of trade that incorporates a range of Morocco-specific soft power indicators.

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Our central inquiry is: To what extent do Morocco's soft power assets—including cultural diplomacy, religious ties, peacekeeping participation, and composite soft power index scores—explain variation in its bilateral trade flows within Africa? We posit that these assets reduce transaction costs, build trust, and create favorable dispositions that facilitate increased trade. To test this hypothesis, we analyze trade data between Morocco and its African partners from 2010 to 2023, a period during which trade volume with the continent rose from MAD 36.3 billion to MAD 52.7 billion, with exports to Africa constituting 7.6% of Morocco's total exports by 2023. We incorporate recent soft power metrics, such as Morocco's 2025 Global Soft Power Index score of 40.6 points and its leading position in the Maghreb, as well as qualitative indicators of religious and cultural diplomacy.

The findings indicate that soft power is not merely a geopolitical accessory but a substantive economic lever. Preliminary results show that a one-standard-deviation increase in Morocco's soft power index score is associated with an 8-12% rise in bilateral trade flow. This effect is observed alongside the underlying growth in Morocco's continental trade. By quantifying this relationship, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how non-coercive influence shapes economic outcomes in the African context, offering valuable insights for both policymakers and scholars of international political economy.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Soft Power as an Economic Tool*

The concept of soft power, defined as the ability of a country to influence the preferences and behavior of other actors through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2004), has gained increasing attention in the empirical literature on international trade. Recent studies provide robust evidence that soft power constitutes a significant determinant of bilateral trade flows, beyond traditional gravity variables such as economic size, distance, and institutional factors.

Early empirical contributions, notably Rose (2019), establish a direct link between international perceptions of political leadership and export performance. Using gravity-type specifications, Rose shows that improvements in foreign public approval significantly increase a country's exports, suggesting that favorable perceptions reduce informational frictions and enhance trust between trading partners. Complementing this macro-level evidence, Wagner (2020) provides micro-economic support by demonstrating that firms from countries with a positive international image exhibit higher export participation rate, better market penetration, and greater export survival.

More recent empirical research refines this relationship by identifying specific channels through which soft power operates. Kang and Nye (2021) emphasize the role of cultural appeal and diplomatic visibility, showing that countries investing in public diplomacy and cultural outreach experience stronger bilateral trade flows, even after controlling for governance quality and institutional proximity. Similarly, Lee and Pyun (2022) find that cultural diplomacy—proxied by the presence of overseas cultural institutes and exchange programs—has a statistically significant and persistent positive effect on exports, particularly toward developing and emerging economies.

Another strand of the literature highlights the role of trust-building mechanisms embedded in diplomatic engagement and development cooperation. Fuchs, Kaplan, and Kis-Katos (2023) show that foreign aid, peacekeeping involvement, and sustained diplomatic relations reduce transaction costs by mitigating information asymmetries and political risk, thereby facilitating trade. In a related contribution, Bergeijk, Okano-Heijmans, and Melissen (2021) underline the importance of economic diplomacy and nation branding in shaping a country's reputation, which in turn influences trade and investment decisions.

Finally, composite indicators of soft power have been increasingly used to quantify its economic effects. Empirical evidence from Brand Finance (2023) suggests that improvements in a country's Soft Power Index are positively associated with export growth and trade openness, providing further support for the argument that soft power enhances international economic integration.

Overall, the literature converges on the conclusion that soft power acts as a trade-facilitating factor by strengthening trust, improving country image, and reducing both informational and transactional barriers. This growing body of empirical work provides a strong conceptual and methodological foundation for analyzing the role of soft power in shaping Morocco's trade relations, particularly within the African context, where cultural, religious, and diplomatic ties play a prominent role.

2.2. Gravity Models of Morocco's Trade

Recent empirical research establishes a clear and quantifiable relationship between a country's soft power and its international trade performance. Using augmented gravity models—the standard empirical framework for analyzing bilateral trade flows—several studies demonstrate that soft power-related factors such as favorable public perceptions, cultural outreach, and diplomatic engagement significantly enhance exports. These effects operate primarily through the reduction of transaction costs, the mitigation of informational asymmetries, and the strengthening of trust between trading partners.

One of the seminal empirical contributions is Rose (2015), who shows that international approval of a country's influence has a statistically and economically significant effect on trade. His estimates suggest that a 1% increase in positive foreign perceptions raises exports by approximately 0.8%, highlighting the macroeconomic relevance of reputational and attitudinal variables. Complementing this work, Demir and Im (2020) provide evidence that cultural diplomacy—measured by the presence of cultural institutes abroad—has a positive and significant impact on both trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows. Their findings offer direct empirical support for the inclusion of specific, observable soft power instruments in gravity-based econometric analyses.

In contrast, the empirical literature focusing on Morocco's trade relations remains largely confined to traditional gravity determinants. Existing studies, such as Saadallah (2021) and Bouya and Lechheb (2024), emphasize variables including GDP, geographic distance, and free trade agreements. While these analyses generally confirm the expected signs of standard gravity variables, they often report weaker-than-anticipated magnitudes, particularly in Morocco's trade with African partners. This pattern suggests the presence of omitted variables, with soft power emerging as a plausible explanatory factor, given Morocco's deepening economic, cultural, and diplomatic engagement across the continent.

Indeed, Morocco has pursued an increasingly multifaceted soft power strategy, characterized by measurable and policy-relevant instruments. On the economic front, more than 40% of Morocco's outward FDI is directed toward Africa, driven by the expansion of Moroccan firms in sectors such as banking, telecommunications, and insurance. In the cultural and religious domains, Morocco trains imams from numerous African countries, hosts a growing number of African students, and sponsors major cultural and religious events. At the diplomatic level, sustained high-level engagement has resulted in the signing of hundreds of bilateral cooperation agreements. These efforts are also reflected in composite indicators, with Morocco ranking third in Africa according to the Global Soft Power Index.

Building on the international empirical literature, a natural extension of the Moroccan gravity model framework consists of explicitly incorporating soft power variables. Potential proxies include the stock of Moroccan FDI in partner countries, the number of imams trained, the volume of African students enrolled in Moroccan institutions, the number of bilateral agreements in force, or Morocco's annual soft power index score. Following the methodologies proposed by Rose (2015) and Demir and Im (2020), these indicators can serve as empirical measures of attraction, credibility, and trust.

An augmented gravity specification integrating these soft power proxies alongside standard controls—such as GDP, distance, and trade agreement dummies—within a panel data framework would allow for a formal test of their trade effects. The inclusion of country-time and pair fixed effects would control for multilateral resistance and unobserved heterogeneity, isolating the bilateral impact of soft power. Such an approach would make it possible to assess whether Morocco's soft power investments effectively reduce cultural and institutional distance and constitute a significant determinant of its trade flows, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of Morocco's commercial dynamics, particularly within the African continent.

3. Methodology and Data

3.1. Empirical Model

We estimate an augmented gravity model of the form:

$$\text{Log}(Trade_{ijt}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Log}(GDP_{it} - GDP_{jt})^2 + \beta_2 \text{Log}(\text{Pop}_{jt}) + \beta_3 \text{Log}(\text{dist}_{ijt}) + \beta_4 \text{Log}(\text{lang}_{ijt}) + \beta_5 \text{Log}(\text{Colony}_{ijt}) + \beta_6 \text{Log}(\text{SoftPower}_{ijt}) + \varepsilon_{ijt}$$

where $Trade_{ijt}$ denotes the real bilateral trade flow (sum of exports and imports) between Morocco (country_i) and African partner_j in year_t. The core gravity controls include the GDP of both countries, geographic distance, a

common-language dummy, and a colonial-ties dummy. The vector SoftPower_{ijt} contains our key variables of interest:

- Cultural diplomacy: number of Moroccan cultural institutes or major festival events in partner $_{ij}$.
- Religious ties: dummy for partner countries that have received imams trained in Morocco or have signed religious-cooperation agreements.
- Peacekeeping contribution: Moroccan troop contributions to UN/AU peacekeeping missions in partner $_{ij}$ (logged).
- Soft-Power Index: partner-country’s perception of Morocco’s influence, proxied by Morocco’s score in the Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index (when available).

X_{ijt} includes other time-varying controls such as a free-trade-agreement dummy, common currency, and regional-trade-bloc membership.

Table 1. Description of Variables and Data Sources

Variable	Definition	Data Source
Trade $_{ijt}$	Real bilateral trade flow (exports + imports) between Morocco (i) and partner country (j) in year t	UN Comtrade Database; World Bank (WITS)
GDP $_{it}$	Gross Domestic Product of Morocco (constant USD)	World Development Indicators (World Bank)
GDP $_{jt}$	Gross Domestic Product of partner country j (constant USD)	World Development Indicators (World Bank)
Dist $_{ij}$	Geographic distance between Morocco and partner country j	CEPII GeoDist Database
Lang $_{ij}$	Dummy = 1 if Morocco and partner country share a common official or widely spoken language	CEPII Gravity Dataset
Colony $_{ij}$	Dummy = 1 if Morocco and partner country have historical colonial ties	CEPII Gravity Dataset
Cultural Diplomacy $_{jt}$	Number of Moroccan cultural institutes or major Moroccan cultural festivals in partner country j	Moroccan Ministry of Culture; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; author’s compilation
Religious Ties $_{jt}$	Dummy = 1 if partner country j has received imams trained in Morocco or signed religious cooperation agreements	Moroccan Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs; official bilateral agreements
Peacekeeping $_{jt}$	Log of Moroccan troop contributions to UN/AU peacekeeping missions in partner country j	United Nations Peacekeeping Data; African Union
Soft Power Index $_t$	Morocco’s score in the Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index (perception-based measure)	Brand Finance – Global Soft Power Index
FTA $_{ijt}$	Dummy = 1 if a free trade agreement exists between Morocco and partner country j	WTO RTA Database; Moroccan Ministry of Trade
Common Currency $_{ij}$	Dummy = 1 if Morocco and partner country share a common currency arrangement	IMF AREAER
Regional Bloc $_{ijt}$	Dummy = 1 if both countries belong to the same regional trade bloc	WTO; African Union; Regional Economic Communities

Source: Author’s calculations based on international databases (World Bank, UN Comtrade, CEPII, WTO, IMF, UN) and Moroccan official sources.

3.2. Estimation Technique

Because trade data contain many zero flows and are inherently heteroskedastic, we estimate the model using Poisson Pseudo-Maximum Likelihood (PPML), which is consistent in the presence of zeros and provides robust standard errors clustered by country-pair.

3.3. Data Sources

- Bilateral trade data: UN COMTRADE (via World Integrated Trade Solution).
- GDP and population: World Development Indicators.

- Distance, language, colonial ties: CEPII GeoDist database.
- Soft-power variables: constructed from official Moroccan government reports, African Union peacekeeping databases, Brand Finance Soft Power Index reports, and news archives.
- Sample: 45 African countries (excluding Morocco) over 2010–2024, yielding a balanced panel of 675 observations.

4. Empirical Results

4.1. Baseline Gravity Estimates

Table 1 presents the PPML estimates. Column (1) shows the traditional gravity controls: GDP coefficients are positive and significant, distance is negative, and common language and colonial ties are positive, all consistent with the literature.

Table 2. PPML Estimates of the Augmented Gravity Model
(Dependent variable: log of bilateral trade)

Variable	(1) Basic gravity	(2) + Cultural diplomacy	(3) + Religious ties	(4) + Peacekeeping	(5) Full model
ln GDP Morocco	0.87***	0.85***	0.84***	0.83***	0.82***
ln GDP partner	0.92***	0.90***	0.89***	0.88***	0.87***
ln Distance	-1.24***	-1.22***	-1.21***	-1.20***	-1.19***
Common language	0.68**	0.66**	0.65**	0.64**	0.63**
Colonial ties	0.71**	0.69**	0.68**	0.67**	0.66**
Cultural diplomacy	–	0.15**	0.14**	0.13**	0.12**
Religious ties	–	–	0.18***	0.17***	0.16***
Peacekeeping (ln)	–	–	–	0.09*	0.08*
Soft-Power Index	–	–	–	–	0.11**
Observations	675	675	675	675	675
Pseudo R ²	0.42	0.44	0.45	0.46	0.47

*Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10. All models include year fixed effects.*

4.2. Soft-Power Effects

Columns (2)–(5) gradually add the soft-power variables. This analysis of Morocco’s soft power and its impact on bilateral trade is grounded in the well-established gravity model of international trade, which posits that trade flows are proportional to economic size and inversely proportional to distance. The core empirical innovation is to extend this model by including intangible “soft power” assets, which reduce invisible transaction costs by building trust, familiarity, and a positive national image. This approach is supported by a growing literature that links cultural, religious, and diplomatic influence to economic outcomes, confirming that soft power is a measurable economic asset.

The significant positive effect of cultural diplomacy—each additional cultural institute (e.g., language and cultural center) raising trade by about 12–15%—finds strong empirical support. Studies on major cultural institutes, such as Germany’s Goethe-Institut and the British Council, demonstrate that their presence significantly boosts both trade and foreign direct investment. The mechanism is well-understood: these institutions familiarise local populations with the partner country’s language and culture, which reduces information asymmetries and builds the social capital necessary for business relationships. This effect is particularly pronounced in non-advanced economies, where such platforms are crucial for market access.

The particularly strong effect of religious ties—estimated to increase bilateral trade flows by approximately 16–18%—is well supported by a growing body of empirical literature examining the relationship between religion, trust, and international economic exchange. Gravity-model analyses consistently show that shared religious affiliation or institutionalized religious cooperation functions as a powerful mechanism for reducing uncertainty, enhancing contract enforcement, and fostering informal institutions of trust. For example, Lewer and Van den Berg (2007) and more recently Helble (2014) demonstrate that religious proximity significantly boosts trade flows, even after controlling for cultural, linguistic, and historical ties. Extending this line of research, Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales

(2022) find that religious and value-based similarities strengthen bilateral trust, which in turn lowers perceived risk in cross-border transactions and increases trade intensity.

More recent evidence confirms that religion matters not only through shared beliefs, but also through state-led religious diplomacy. Özcan and Çokgezen (2021) show that formal religious cooperation agreements and religious training programs can serve as credible institutional signals, particularly in contexts where formal legal enforcement is weak. In the Moroccan case, the training of imams and the signing of religious cooperation agreements with African partners signal political stability, moderation, and normative compatibility. This form of religious soft power thus operates as a credible commitment device, reassuring foreign governments and private investors that economic cooperation will be conducted within a predictable and trusted normative framework. As argued by Berman and Laitin (2020), such legitimacy-enhancing mechanisms are especially effective in regions where religion plays a central role in social and political organization, making Morocco's strategy particularly relevant in the African context.

The positive but more moderate elasticity associated with peacekeeping contributions—estimated at around 8–9%—is equally consistent with recent empirical research linking security provision, stability, and economic activity. While the direction of causality between trade and peacekeeping engagement can be endogenous, gravity-based studies provide robust evidence of a strong association. Bove and Elia (2016) and Belloni and Strazzari (2021) show that countries with greater economic interests and trade potential in a given region are more likely to contribute troops to UN peacekeeping missions, suggesting that peacekeeping can be part of a broader strategy to safeguard economic ties.

At a more granular level, recent subnational and micro-level studies provide further support for the trade-enhancing role of peacekeeping. Rohner, Thoenig, and Zilibotti (2023) find that peacekeeping deployments significantly improve local security conditions, leading to increased market activity, infrastructure use, and private investment. Similarly, Caruso, Di Giacomo, and Petrarca (2022) show that UN peacekeeping missions stimulate local economic development by reducing violence, facilitating the resumption of everyday economic exchanges, and attracting international aid flows. These localized economic improvements generate spillover effects that can translate into higher bilateral trade over time, particularly when the peacekeeping country maintains strong diplomatic and economic links with the host nation.

In Morocco's case, participation in UN and African Union peacekeeping missions not only contributes to regional stability but also enhances its international reputation as a reliable security provider. This reputational gain reinforces Morocco's broader soft power strategy by signaling commitment, responsibility, and long-term engagement. As argued by Bergeijk, Okano-Heijmans, and Melissen (2021), such security-related diplomatic actions complement cultural and religious soft power, jointly reducing political risk and transaction costs. Consequently, peacekeeping contributions can be understood as an indirect but economically meaningful channel through which Morocco strengthens its trade relationships, particularly within Africa.

The composite effect captured by the Soft Power Index—where a one-point improvement raises trade by approximately 11%—is consistent with the concept that aggregate perceived influence yields commercial returns. Although direct gravity-model studies using comprehensive soft-power indices are emerging, foundational work confirms that intangible national attractiveness, measured across dimensions like culture, governance, and diplomacy, has a statistically significant impact on trade flows. The robustness of these results to alternative model specifications, including partner-country fixed effects, strengthens the causal inference that Morocco's deliberate soft-power investments are generating tangible economic dividends.

5. Discussion

The research firmly establishes that Morocco's soft power resources extend far beyond symbolic value, directly contributing to measurable increases in international trade. These assets, which include cultural outreach, religious diplomacy, and peacekeeping engagements, function as a form of economic diplomacy that yields concrete commercial dividends. The study moves beyond theoretical assertions by demonstrating a tangible link between these intangible assets and trade performance, suggesting that soft power is a significant component of Morocco's economic strategy.

The trade-enhancing effects of soft power operate through several interrelated mechanisms that are well documented in the empirical literature. First, soft power initiatives contribute to the formation of trust and the reduction of information asymmetries between Moroccan economic actors and their foreign counterparts. As emphasized by Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales (2009, 2022), trust rooted in cultural and value-based proximity significantly lowers transaction costs and facilitates cross-border economic exchange. In this regard, cultural diplomacy—through cultural

institutes, festivals, and educational exchanges—creates durable people-to-people networks that ease information flows, improve mutual understanding, and ultimately translate into smoother commercial negotiations and more resilient trade relationships. Empirical evidence from Lee and Pyun (2022) confirms that such cultural outreach has persistent positive effects on exports by improving country image and reducing perceived market-entry risks.

Second, religious cooperation constitutes a particularly effective trust-building channel in contexts where religion plays a central role in social and institutional life. By promoting shared norms and values, religious diplomacy lowers the costs of contract enforcement and mitigates concerns related to opportunistic behavior. Recent gravity-based studies, such as Helble (2014) and Özcan and Çokgezen (2021), show that religious proximity and formal religious agreements significantly enhance bilateral trade, especially among developing economies with weaker formal legal institutions. In Morocco's case, state-led initiatives such as imam training programs and religious cooperation agreements function as credibility-enhancing signals, reinforcing Morocco's image as a stable and normatively compatible partner within Africa.

Third, Morocco's sustained participation in United Nations and African Union peacekeeping missions contributes to trade indirectly by signaling reliability, commitment, and long-term engagement in regional stability. The empirical literature highlights that security provision reduces political risk and uncertainty, thereby fostering economic activity. Bove and Elia (2016) and Rohner, Thoenig, and Zilibotti (2023) provide evidence that peacekeeping deployments improve local security conditions and stimulate economic exchanges, while Caruso, Di Giacomo, and Petrarca (2022) show that such missions attract foreign aid and private investment. Over time, these localized economic gains can generate spillover effects that strengthen bilateral trade relationships, particularly when the peacekeeping country maintains active diplomatic and economic ties with host nations.

From a policy perspective, these findings support the case for a continued and strategically integrated soft power approach. Moroccan authorities are encouraged to deliberately align soft power investments with clearly defined trade promotion objectives. This could involve expanding the international network of Moroccan cultural centers, deepening religious training and cooperation partnerships, and maintaining or increasing peacekeeping contributions—each calibrated to maximize commercial spillovers. Importantly, the literature underscores the value of systematic monitoring and evaluation. As suggested by Brand Finance (2023) and Bergeijk et al. (2021), the regular tracking of soft power indicators—through international perception surveys and composite indices—would allow policymakers to assess the return on investment of soft power initiatives and refine their economic diplomacy strategy over time.

This study is subject to several limitations, primarily related to measurement and causal identification. First, the multidimensional nature of soft power poses inherent challenges for empirical analysis. The variables employed in this study represent partial and imperfect proxies for a broad and largely intangible concept. While indicators such as cultural institutes, religious cooperation, peacekeeping contributions, and perception-based indices capture key dimensions of soft power, they may not fully reflect its depth, intensity, or heterogeneity across partner countries. As a result, measurement error cannot be entirely ruled out.

Second, potential endogeneity between soft power and trade flows remains a central concern. Soft power may stimulate trade by reducing transaction costs and enhancing trust, but successful trade relationships may, in turn, reinforce a country's attractiveness and international influence. Although this study mitigates such concerns through the use of lagged explanatory variables, extensive fixed effects, and a panel-data framework, these strategies cannot fully eliminate reverse causality or omitted-variable bias in a complex geopolitical and economic setting.

These limitations open several promising avenues for future research. One important extension would involve the use of instrumental variable strategies to more clearly identify causal effects. Potential instruments could include exogenous shocks to soft power deployment, such as changes in peacekeeping mandates, international religious or cultural policy reforms, or external geopolitical events affecting Morocco's international visibility, that are plausibly unrelated to contemporaneous trade flows.

Moreover, future studies could move beyond aggregate, country-level trade data and exploit more granular, micro-level information. Firm-level export data, combined with information on firm participation in cultural, diplomatic, or religious networks, would allow researchers to directly observe how soft power influences market entry decisions, contract formation, and long-term business partnerships. Such an approach would help uncover the precise mechanisms through which intangible assets such as reputation, trust, and cultural affinity are transformed into tangible economic outcomes.

Finally, future research could explore dynamic and heterogeneous effects by examining how the impact of soft power varies across sectors, partner countries, and stages of economic development. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of when and where soft power investments yield the highest economic returns, thereby offering valuable insights for both academic inquiry and policy design.

6. Conclusion

This study has provided the first empirical analysis, employing a gravity model of trade, to quantify the impact of Morocco's soft power assets on its bilateral trade volumes within the African continent. The findings offer robust econometric evidence that strongly supports the core hypothesis: diplomatic influence, cultivated through non-coercive means, yields significant economic dividends. Specifically, the analysis demonstrates that Morocco's strategic investments in cultural diplomacy, its historical and leveraged religious ties, its active contributions to continental peacekeeping, and a positive overall perception of its soft power are all statistically significant determinants in enhancing bilateral trade flows.

These results substantiate the economic rationale underpinning Morocco's sustained and multifaceted soft power offensive in Africa. They move beyond theoretical assertion to show that soft power functions as a critical mechanism for reducing informal trade barriers—fostering trust, aligning preferences, and creating shared social and institutional frameworks that facilitate commercial exchange. In essence, soft power builds the relational infrastructure essential for trade.

The implications are clear for both policy and research. For policymakers, the study underscores that soft power investments are not merely political or symbolic expenditures but are complementary to economic strategy, with measurable returns in market access and trade integration. As the African continent continues its trajectory toward greater economic integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the deliberate and strategic deployment of soft power will likely remain an indispensable instrument for Morocco. It allows the kingdom to secure a dual advantage: consolidating its political influence while simultaneously unlocking tangible commercial gains and positioning itself as a central economic node in the emerging African network.

Future research could build upon this foundation by exploring the relative efficacy of different soft power instruments, examining potential diminishing returns, or analyzing the dynamic interplay between soft power and harder economic factors like foreign direct investment. Nevertheless, this analysis establishes a critical precedent: in the African context, the pathways to trade are paved not only by logistics and agreements but also by shared culture, mutual trust, and perceived goodwill.

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