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## To Utilize Structural Equation Modelling to Investigate the Impact of Cross-border Tourism on Regional Cooperation: The Mediating Effect of Community Support\*

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**Abstract:** Tourism plays an important role in encouraging cooperation and peace between the partitioned countries. The current study aims to investigate the influence of cross-border tourism on bilateral trade and cooperation between India and Myanmar. Further, the paper identifies the role of community support as a mediator between exogenous and endogenous variables. An onsite questionnaire is distributed among the residents of Indian border areas close to the neighboring border of Myanmar. The SEM is employed to reject the null hypotheses and test the proposed model empirically. The findings reveal that all the proposed hypotheses are supported. The cross-border cooperation is positively influenced by cross-border tourism development and trade between India and Myanmar. Moreover, community support mediates the relationship between cross-border tourism, bilateral trade, and cooperation. An important consideration from this paper is that tourism supported by border communities can act as a catalyst for promoting cooperation among hostile countries. India and Myanmar being close neighbors, have huge scope to support each other through different cross-border programs, projects, and bilateral trade. The study provides valuable insights for both countries to adopt tourism initiatives as a tool to ameliorate their relationships and develop the economic conditions of border communities.

*Keywords:* cross-border tourism, bilateral trade, cooperation, India, Myanmar

*JEL Codes:* F15, F51, Z32

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the literature, cross-border tourism between neighboring states is understudied and may initially be considered a barrier (Timothy and Tosun, 2003a; Sofield, 2006). Whether it's a

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municipal, township, county, provincial, state, or international border that must be crossed, tourist travel almost always necessitates crossing a political boundary. Crossing an international border bothers travelers even though subnational borders do not significantly affect tourist flows (Timothy, 1995). There is a tendency for personal action spaces to shift toward or away from a political barrier if no cultural or social groups can spread over it (Farmaki et al., 2019). Examples of governments exchanging valuable natural or cultural resources with neighboring regions ripe for tourism development abound. All of these situations, however, necessitate government backing and approval. Tourism and trade are frequently cited as examples of economic activities that help to open borders, both physical and social (Kanwal et al., 2020). Since all of existence may be viewed as a performance on a stage, borders are the set design and staging necessary for actors and watchers alike to work together to make the play's narrative flow as smoothly as possible (Wilson and Donnan, 2012). A recurring issue emerging from previous studies is that cross-border tourism has the ability to influence the standard of living of border regions. Cross-border tourism (CBT) and trade could represent a unique chance to start peacebuilding processes across borders. Cross-border tourism and trade are generally believed to foster the economic growth of the border communities and improve their standard of living; this will help the countries reduce poverty in remote areas. According to (Vodeb, 2010), collaboration presupposes open communication and adaptation as critical components of resolving shared difficulties and fostering fruitful and satisfying cooperation and engagement. Lederach (1997) defines cross-border cooperation as "encompassing, generating, and sustaining the complete array of processes and stages needed to shift conflict toward more sustainable and peaceful relationships".

India and Myanmar share an international border; the line divides the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram in Northeast India from Myanmar's Chin State, Sagaing Region, and Kachin State. The boundary is 1643 kilometers long, stretching from Bangladesh in the south to the tripoint with China (Das, 2013). The two countries have inked a series of treaties to increase bilateral cooperation. A Free Movement Regime (FMR) covers the India-Myanmar border, allowing the bordering tribes to cross freely for 16 kilometers (9.9 miles) on each side of the border without the need for a visa (Das, 2013). It improves the Burmese people's access to India's healthcare infrastructure, among other things. Approximately 250 villages with more than 300,000 residents are located within ten kilometers (6.2 miles) of the border and often cross the border through 150 small and major legal and informal crossing points (Mukhim, 2015). The two countries' geographical proximity has aided in developing and maintaining cordial relations and facilitated people-to-people communication. Myanmar is Southeast Asia's only landlocked country, sharing a land border with north-eastern India (Dhyani, 2021). Relations between India and Myanmar are based on shared historical, ethnic, cultural, and religious links. For the people of Myanmar, India is a country of pilgrimage because it is the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Buddhism and the Burmese script, both of which were influenced by the Indian Grantha alphabet, are examples of the cross-cultural exchanges that occurred between India and Myanmar/Burma. Myanmar/Burma and India signed a boundary agreement on March 10, 1967, which outlined their shared border in great detail (Das, 2013). In 1994, Myanmar and India signed a border trade agreement, and the 1643-kilometre border now has two active border trade points (Zowkhatar-Rhi and Moreh-Tamu). Although there are other border checkpoints, there is a

growing demand for such amenities near the Pangsau Pass in Nampong. More people visit the Moreh crossing checkpoint, popularly known as the India-Myanmar Friendship gate.

India-Myanmar commerce has increased steadily since the signing of the India-Myanmar trade agreement in 1970, but there was a slight decrease in the 1980s (Taw, 2018). Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj signed a cross-border travel allowance agreement with Myanmar on May 11, 2018, as part of the seven agreements inked during her visit to Myanmar (Ministry of External Affairs, 2018). Nowadays, an important issue in political geography is figuring out how cross-border cooperation initiatives, performed by both state and non-state actors, diverge, shape, and provide in-depth analyses of border zones. As a result of trade, nations develop an economic interest in one another, and individuals get to know one another better (Ali et al., 2015). It was well known among SAARC members that regional collaboration in the tourist sector had enormous potential for fostering regional identity, deepening mutual understanding, and spurring economic growth. Tourism could benefit from tourism, people-to-people exchanges, regional and worldwide visitor attractions, economic development, poverty reduction, and job creation (SAARC Secretariat, 1990). Myanmar's image can be improved with India's assistance because of India's democratic credentials. Countries and local populations will benefit if cross-border tourism is efficiently implemented. When neighboring countries collaborate on cross-border tourism, they can generate cross-border ties and peacebuilding and benefit the two countries economies. Tourism provides a way to connect with the local population (Hall and Richards, 2000; Beeton, 2006). Therefore, tourism collaboration between neighboring countries is becoming increasingly possible due to local, state, and national measures to foster closer ties and greater tolerance among neighbors. Several studies have examined the proposition that tourism can potentially reduce the conflicts between or among the portioned nations (Kim and Prideaux, 2003; Vodeb, 2010; Batala et al., 2016; Wani et al., 2022). Therefore, the primary purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of cross-border tourism on bilateral trade and cross-border cooperation. Structural Equation Modelling was employed to test the proposed model empirically. Additionally, the study identifies the mediation effect of community support on cross-border cooperation and peace-building in India and Myanmar.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism promotes participatory peacemaking to foster mutual understanding and cooperation among cultures (Causevic, 2010; Wani et al., 2022). There are many reasons why regional assimilation can be achieved through the territorial cooperation process, which is considered a fundamental political procedure to reduce the barriers posed by all kinds of borders and to promote territorial development (Knippschild, 2011; Dada et al., 2022). Depending on the region's characteristics, the mix of available resources, the strategies and activities devoted to promoting tourism, and cross-border collaboration, tourism can catalyze economic development in cross-border regions (European Commission, 2000). Many previous studies have used the contact hypothesis to portray tourism as an agent to establish rapport and build trust between previously estranged groups (Sonmez and Apostolopoulos, 2000; Kim and Prideaux, 2003; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003; Causevic, 2010; Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2010; Zhang, 2013). It is asserted that tourism is fundamentally a tool for pro-

moting collaboration and enhancing peacebuilding processes (Medeiros, 2015; Baniya et al., 2018). Institutions such as the UNWTO have mainly followed the same route, frequently in conjunction with a liberal peace approach that emphasizes tourism's capacity to foster economic growth (Megoran, 2011). Timothy and Tosun (2003a) stated that local communities should be directly involved in decision-making processes that distribute specific profits to the community. Historically, the primary focus of cross-border tourism has been on cooperation (Sonmez and Apostolopoulos, 2000; Ioannides et al., 2006; Prokkola, 2010).

Many researchers have examined how local populations feel about tourism growth (Jurowski et al., 1997; Andereck and Vogt, 2000). More and better-paying jobs, better living conditions, and a better quality of life are just a few of the benefits that several studies have documented from locals' positive attitudes toward tourist development (Rehman et al., 2020). Community participation can transform the community's passive attitude into a responsible and favorable outlook, inspire entrepreneurial ventures, build partnership and collaboration, promote a spirit of cohesiveness, and rejuvenate relationships between people and diverse stakeholders (Medeiros, 2015; Idziak et al., 2015). Cross-border tourism and cultural cooperation have a more pragmatic and evident value for expanding tourism sectors in neighboring nations. In recent decades, studies of international borders and boundaries have considered peacebuilding and cross-border collaboration as important issues (Kim and Prideaux, 2006; Silva, 2017; Farmaki et al., 2019). The conceptual research framework for the present study is displayed in figure 1.

## 2.1. Cross-border Tourism

The term "cross-border tourism" is a bit of a misnomer because it embraces a wide range of activities that might occur in a single day, all of which require crossing an international border (Timothy and Tosun, 2003b). South Asian countries' economic success could be boosted by increased tourism (Rasul and Manandhar, 2009), which could help alleviate poverty (Batala et al., 2016). Businesses benefit from cross-border travel because it boosts their knowledge and makes it easier to think about globalization and innovation (Setnikar Cankar et al., 2014). According to (Chauhan and Khanna, 2008), tourism contributes to economic progress, increasing foreign exchange profits, cohesion, and peace between the parties involved (Mishra and Verma, 2017). Cross-border tourism encourages social justice and resolution (Perkmann, 2003; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003). Interacting with other people and exchanging ideas is at the heart of tourism's mission to foster understanding and decrease barriers between different cultures (Sharma et al., 2018). Several empirical studies have demonstrated the importance of tourism in promoting peace (e.g., Kim and Prideaux, 2006; Cho, 2007; Dada et al., 2022). Due to reduced transit costs, cross-border tourism helps to construct infrastructure, improving trade flows (Setnikar Cankar et al., 2014). To build bridges between and among diverse nations, tourism plays a crucial role in facilitating intercultural understanding (Chauhan and Khanna, 2008; Wani et al., 2022). Tourism is also seen as a social force that can aid in establishing and maintaining world peace by fostering international understanding, cooperation, and worldwide goodwill (D'Amore, 1988).

H1: Cross-border tourism has a significant impact on bilateral trade between India and Myanmar.

H2: Cross-border tourism has a significant impact on cross-border cooperation between India and Myanmar.

H3: Cross-border tourism positively influences the community support between India and Myanmar.

## **2.2. Bilateral Trade**

Peace among nations substantially impacts the flow of commerce between them. Infrastructure development also boosts trade because of lower transportation costs. "Trade openness" has a strong negative influence on the likelihood of armed conflict (Barbieri and Peters, 2003). Additionally, trade relations could signal opponents of a state's resolve in a dispute over topics about which the state is still concerned (Gartzke et al., 2001; Gartzke, 2007). Foreign Direct Investment and trade have a positive influence on the gross domestic product of nations (Rehman et al., 2021). When war is reduced, and peace is promoted, it encourages neighboring countries to increase bilateral trade links, which is good for the economic growth of both countries (Mishra and Verma, 2017; Shabbir et al., 2022). Due to bilateral trade, more people are moving across borders, which could lead to long-term peace and benefit the local community (Kozak and Buhalis, 2019; Kanwal et al., 2020). An increased understanding of each other may result from joint cross-border projects managed by both countries (Blatter, 2004; Dada et al., 2022). By encouraging cross-border tourism, geographically close countries can benefit more from increased bilateral commercial interdependence. Cross-border terrorism and violence are discouraged if trade between the two countries increases (Ali et al., 2015). An increase in bilateral trade will positively impact both countries' long-term relations and the entire region.

H4: Bilateral Trade has a significant impact on the cross-border cooperation between India and Myanmar.

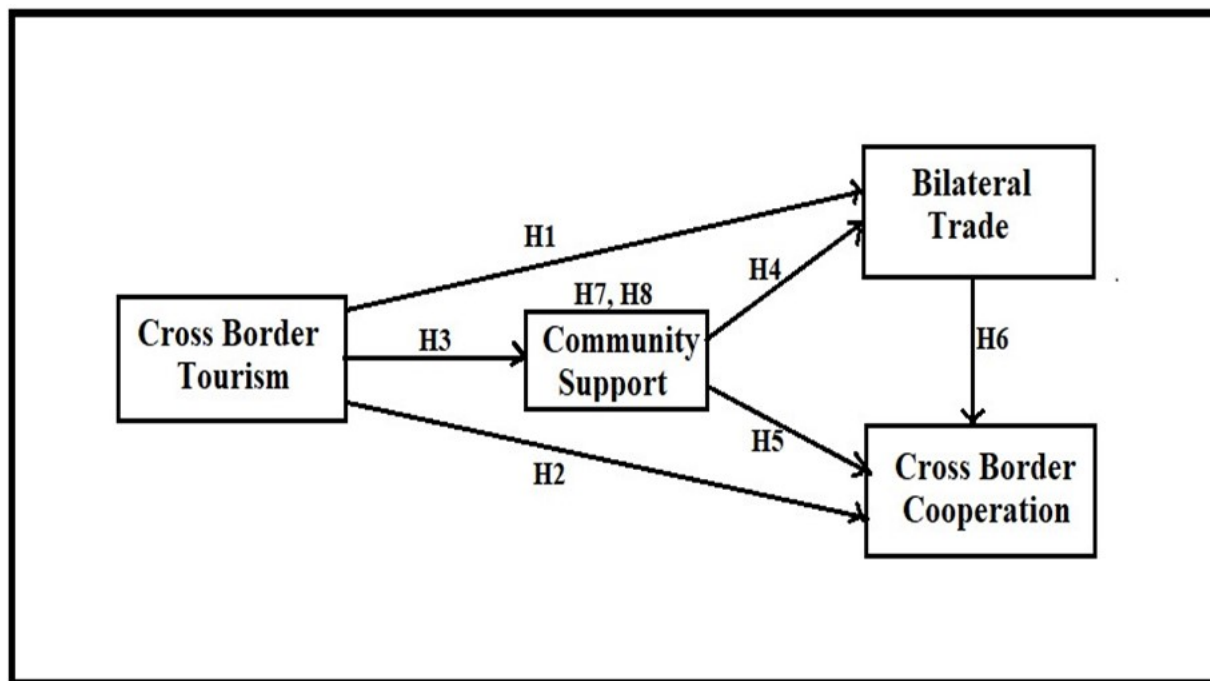
## **2.3. Community Support**

Numerous central and local governments, planners, and the host community all support tourism growth as a means of improving local quality of life (Snyman, 2012). People are more inclined to support the development of tourism if perceived advantages surpass projected expenses (Jeonglyeol Lee et al., 2007; Dyer et al., 2007; Gursoy et al., 2010). Local communities play an essential role in tourism management in underdeveloped nations (Khalid et al., 2019). Cross-border linkages, regional integration, and peace are improved by promoting tourism, and cultural exchanges, and increasing community members, professional groups, and non-profit organizations (SAARC Secretariat, 1991). Tolerance and positive attitudes toward tourism are better when host communities participate in tourism development (Easterling, 2005; Tosun, 2006).

H5: Community support significantly influences the bilateral trade between India and Myanmar.

H6: Community support has a significant impact on the cross-border cooperation between India and Myanmar.

Figure 1: Research Framework



#### 2.4. Mediation effect of community support

The decision-making process and the long-term viability of the tourism sector are both aided by community involvement in the industry's development (D'Amore, 1992). Cross-border tourism may uplift the livelihood of communities and improve their quality of life which means communities will help to set grounds for the trade and cooperation between the countries (Baniya et al., 2018). Support from the community for cross-border tourism minimizes tensions and disagreements, thereby promoting collaboration and peacebuilding between the two nations (Zhang et al., 2006). When supported by local communities, tourism has the potential to reinforce the peacemaking process and inspire people to develop friendlier attitudes toward one another (Kim and Prideaux, 2006; Kim et al., 2007; Farmaki et al., 2019). While tourism is not the only option for revitalizing border regions, it can be enhanced by the area's general growth, and, reciprocally, tourism can aid in creating investment opportunities in a variety of other sectors of the economy (Badulescu et al., 2014). Community support and person-to-person contact enhance tourism development and improve the bilateral diplomatic relations between the nations (Dada et al., 2022). Recognizing peoples' perspectives enables the establishment of policies that mitigate the negative impacts of tourism development while increasing its profits, leading to the progress of the community and increased support for it (Prayag et al., 2013).

H7: Community support mediates the relationship between cross-border tourism and bilateral trade between India and Myanmar.

H8: Community support mediates the relationship between cross-border tourism and the cross-border cooperation between India and Myanmar.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Measures and Instrument

The questionnaire with a total of 18 items was formulated based on the literature used to develop the study model. Cross-border tourism was measured by five items adapted from (Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996; Sharma et al., 2018). The construct of community support was measured by four items borrowed from (Ko and Stewart, 2002; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011). Four items for measuring bilateral trade were adopted from the studies (Dorussen and Ward, 2010; Rolandsen, 2019). Finally, cross-border cooperation was operationalized by adopting five items from (Hataley and Leuprecht, 2018; Sharma et al., 2018). A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 representing strongly disagree to strongly agree was used to collect data.

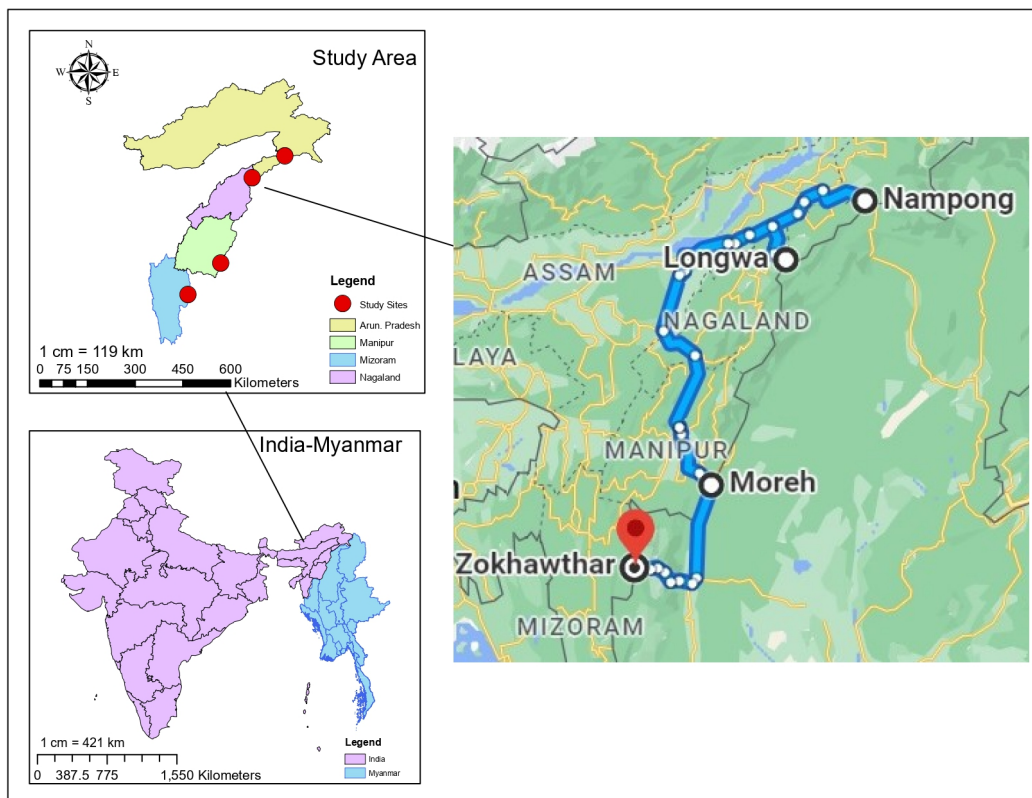
#### 3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

The target population of the present study is the residents living on the Indian side of the Indo-Myanmar border. Four Indian states share a border with Myanmar, so four villages namely Moreh (Manipur), Nampong (Arunachal Pradesh), Zokhawtar (Mizoram), and Longwa (Nagaland), were selected for the study. The map of the study sites is presented in Figure 2. The villages were selected based on having proximity to the border. According to Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) requirements, the primary data analysis technique in this study, a sample size of at least 400 respondents was targeted (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2010). Among 510 self-administered questionnaires distributed randomly among the residents, a total of 441 questionnaires were obtained, representing a response rate of 86.47%. Moreover, during the pre-processing of data, 19 responses were removed due to missing data points. As a result, only 422 usable questionnaires were used for subsequent analysis. Among the total respondents, men were 57.8% and women were 42.1%. Regarding the age 31% were between 18-29 years, 41% were 30-44 years, 22% were 45-59 years and 4.5% were 60 or above. The education level of 35% respondents was high school or less, nearly one-fourth were secondary educated, 21% were graduates and 14% were having the qualifications of post-graduation or above. The primary demographic characteristics of respondents are displayed in Table 1.

#### 3.3. Data Analysis

The study uses the following approaches: confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) with SPSS 23 and Amos 23 software. Cronbach's Alpha testing is used to assess the consistency of a scale of variables and rule out insufficient variables. Confirmatory factor analysis is used to redefine concept values that are univariate, multivariate, convergent, and discriminant. Finally, structural equation modeling is used to evaluate the theoretical structural model and determine the influence level of the independent variable on the dependent variable based on the CFA results.

**Figure 2: Study Location**



**Table 1: Respondents' demographic characteristics**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	244	57.81
Female	178	42.18
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	134	31.75
30-44	175	41.46
45-59	94	22.27
60 and above	19	4.5
<b>Education</b>		
High school or below	151	35.78
12th	118	27.96
Graduation	92	21.8
Post-Graduate and above	61	14.45



## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Reliability and Validity of Constructs

AVE is used to measure convergent validity (Average variance extracted). All of the constructs' AVE values exceeded the recommended limit of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As a result, convergent validity was established. Further, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values are used to assess the Consistency/Reliability of responses. Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs, namely, cross-border tourism (CBT), community support (CS), bilateral trade (BT), and cross-border cooperation (CBC), were 0.879, 0.832, 0.845, and 0.789 respectively. All of the values were greater than the suggested level of 0.70. (Hair et al., 2013). Composite reliability (CR) estimations calculated for all constructs were above the suggested standard of 0.70 (Garver and Mentzer, 1999); thus, the scale's reliability was established. Table 2 shows the AVE, CR, and Cronbach's alpha values for the data used in the study. As a result of  $AVE > 0.50$  and  $CR > AVE$ , convergent validity was demonstrated. Moreover, discriminant validity is always an important assessment for determining the validity of constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The AVE of each construct must be bigger than the squared correlation between the construct and the remaining constructs. The discriminant validity of constructs is shown in Table 3. The square root of AVE for a given construct was greater than the absolute value of a construct's standardized correlation with all other constructs, according to Table 3. Thus, it demonstrated the discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

### 4.2. Structural Model Results

The structural equation modeling technique was used to assess the suggested model's applicability and to test the study's hypotheses. Model fit indices with  $X^2 = 287$ ,  $df = 179$ ,  $X^2/df = 1.60$ ,  $p = 0.001$  are satisfactory. In SPSS Amos  $X^2$  is represented as CMIN/df. It signifies the difference between the expected and the observed covariance matrices. The default model's CMIN/df value is  $1.603 < 2$ ; this indicates a good fit (Ullman, 2001). Additionally, the measurement model suggests that the GFI is 0.963, the CFI is 0.986, and the TLI is 0.975, indicating that all values are acceptable (Hair et al., 2013). The root mean square error of the fit is 0.036, which is totally within the acceptable range, i.e., less than 0.08, indicating that the model is a good fit (MacCallum et al., 1996). The output results of the structural model are presented in Figure 3.

### 4.3. Hypotheses Testing

The results of direct and indirect hypotheses are displayed in Tables 4 and 5 respectively. Firstly, we proposed the effect of cross-border tourism on bilateral trade, cross-border cooperation, and community support. The statistical findings of the study show that cross-border tourism has a significant effect on bilateral trade ( $\beta = 0.586$ ,  $t = 7.146$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), cross-border cooperation ( $\beta = 0.395$ ,  $t = 4.937$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and community support ( $\beta = 0.412$ ,  $t = 5.350$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hence H1, H2, and H3 are supported. Secondly, H4 and H5 contend that community support positively and significantly impacts bilateral trade and

**Table 2:** Reliability and validity of constructs/measures

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach's	CR	AVE
Cross-border Tourism (CBT)			0.879	0.914	0.680
	CBT1	0.796			
	CBT2	0.864			
	CBT3	0.821			
	CBT4	0.804			
Community Support (CS)	CBT5	0.839			
			0.832	0.881	0.650
	CS1	0.809			
	CS2	0.818			
	CS3	0.754			
Bilateral Trade (BT)	CS4	0.843			
			0.845	0.893	0.677
	BT1	0.877			
	BT2	0.824			
	BT3	0.774			
Cross-border Tourism (CBT)	BT4	0.813			
			0.789	0.901	0.645
	CBC1	0.785			
	CBC2	0.822			
	CBC3	0.783			
	CBC4	0.84			
	CBC5	0.786			

**Indices:** AVE= average variance extracted, CR= composite reliability

**Table 3:** Discriminant validity of constructs

	1	2	3	4
1. Cross-border tourism	<b>0.824</b>			
2. Community support	0.378	<b>0.806</b>		
3. Bilateral trade	0.212	0.238	<b>0.822</b>	
4. Cross-border cooperation	0.385	0.347	0.364	<b>0.803</b>

**Note:** "In bold= Square root of AVE, under bold diagonal are estimated correlations"

cross-border cooperation. The statistical estimates show that community support has a significant effect on bilateral trade ( $\beta = 0.291, t = 3.881, p < 0.001$ ) and cross-border cooperation ( $\beta = 0.274, t = 3.382, p < 0.001$ ). Hence, H4 and H5 are supported. Thirdly, we hypothesized the positive effect of bilateral trade on cross-border cooperation, which is also found statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.278, t = 3.657, p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, H6 is also supported.

**Table 4:** Hypotheses Testing

Direct Effects						
Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Estimate	Stand. Error	t-value	Result	
H1	$CBT \rightarrow BT$	0.586	0.082	7.146*	Significant	
H2	$CBT \rightarrow CBC$	0.395	0.08	4.937*	Significant	
H3	$CBT \rightarrow CS$	0.412	0.077	5.350*	Significant	
H4	$CS \rightarrow BT$	0.291	0.075	3.881*	Significant	
H5	$CS \rightarrow CBC$	0.274	0.081	3.382*	Significant	
H6	$BT \rightarrow CBC$	0.278	0.076	3.657*	Significant	

**Note:** \* $p < 0.001$

**Indices:** CBT=cross-border tourism, CS=community support, BT= bilateral trade, CBC=cross-border cooperation

To quantify indirect effects, path analysis was conducted in Amos using the bootstrapping method (Byrne, 2010). Cross-border tourism has a significant indirect effect ( $\beta = 0.119, t = 3.501, p < 0.01$ ) on bilateral trade via community support. It is thus inferred that community support mediates the relationship between cross-border tourism and bilateral trade. Hence, H7 is accepted. Further, the indirect effect of cross-border tourism on cross-border cooperation via community support is significant with ( $\beta = 0.112, t = 2.871, p < 0.05$ ), it can be inferred that community support plays a mediating role between cross-border tourism and cross-border cooperation. Therefore H8 is also supported. It is also recognized that the direct effect of cross-border tourism on bilateral trade and cross-border cooperation is significant. However, the direct effects are reduced when the mediator is incorporated into the model. Thus, the mediation is partial.

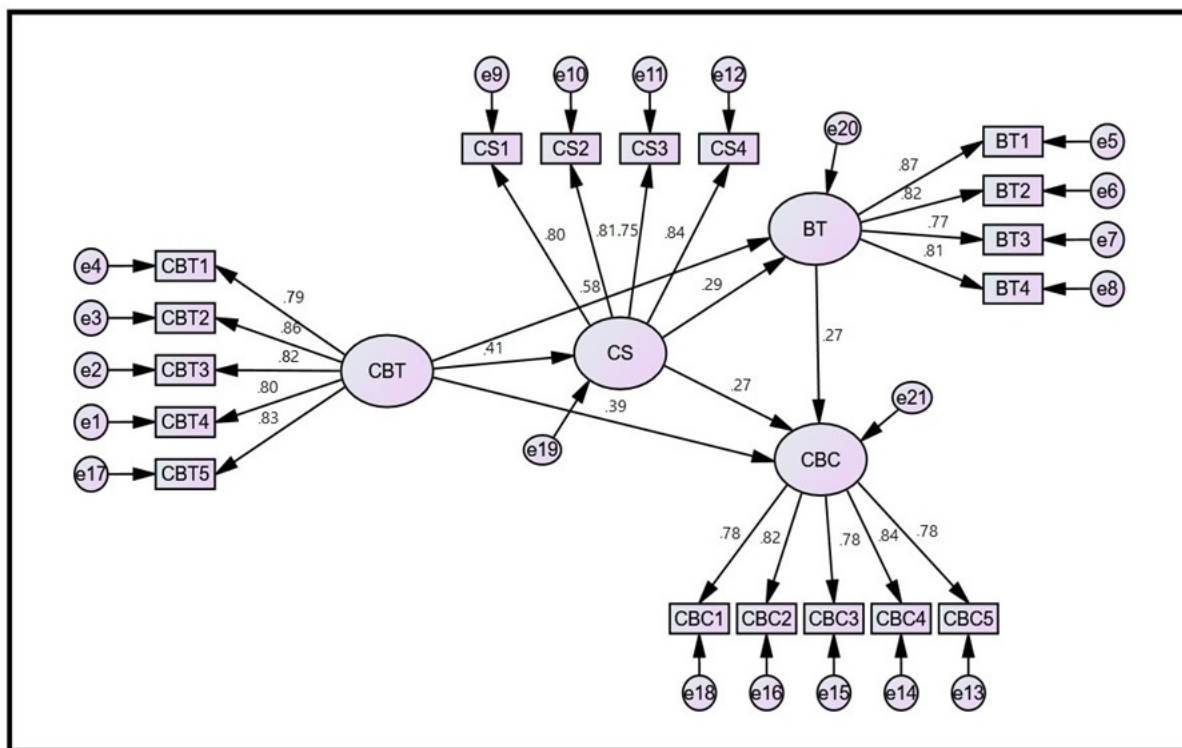
**Table 5:** Hypotheses Testing

Indirect Effects						
Hypothesis	Relationship	Std. Estimate	Std. Error	t-value	Result	
H7	$CBT \rightarrow CS \rightarrow BT$	0.119	0.034	3.501*	Significant	
H8	$CBT \rightarrow CS \rightarrow CBC$	0.112	0.039	2.871**	Significant	

**Note:** \* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$

**Indices:** CBT=cross-border tourism, CS=community support, BT= bilateral trade, CBC=cross-border cooperation

Figure 3: Structural Model



## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper explores the impact of cross-border tourism development to enhance the bilateral trade links and cross-border cooperation between India and Myanmar. It further analyzed the influence of community support of border areas to minimize the disputes and conflicts related to the border of both nations. The results displayed in Tables 4 and 5 indicate that all the proposed hypotheses are supported. Although there exist bilateral relations between the two countries but the development of tourism across borders will maintain these relations and may create a conducive environment for new bilateral trade agreements and maintain cooperation and peace between them. Borders are considered the laboratories of adaptation and border communities can help integrate two different nations by adopting the Track-Two diplomacy, thus building trust between them and promoting regional peace and cooperation. Myanmar serves as a nexus between India and Southeast Asia, particularly its northeastern areas, making it crucial from an economic and public relations standpoint. India, as a huge nation, shares borders with many countries in South Asia and also provides assistance to its neighboring countries. The developing nations of South Asia are interdependent on one another both politically and economically. The CBC is a framework for productive collaboration between two sovereign countries, with cooperative programs, priorities, and actions.

Cross-border tourism development will bring benefits, such as improved cross-border infrastructure, which will encourage trade flows, and develop mutual understanding, cooperation, and peacebuilding between India and Myanmar. The local communities will also

benefit from the spillover effects of increased trade and tourism across the two borders. It is well understood that cross-border tourism may become the only way forward in relations between the two countries. Their economic and commercial collaboration can help alleviate tensions and distrust, ultimately bringing peace and tranquillity to the entire region. Tourism has been considered as a major industry to support remote regions like border communities. Rural and border communities have benefitted a lot from tourism projects in terms of economic and social development. Community support can help the nations to improve their cross-border links by adopting the concept of the people-to-people contact hypothesis and thus promote mutual understanding and cooperation between them.

Economic activity is accelerated by trade, which lessens conflict. The likelihood of border clashes may be reduced if trade relations between Myanmar and India improve and there is growth in imports and exports. With the help of border haats, trading posts, and transit facilities, the border territories between India and Myanmar might become a symbol of shared prosperity. Both countries' rich natural, historical, and cultural endowments stand to profit significantly from cooperation because of the potential for more excellent political stability in the region. An additional facet of Indo-Myanmar border cooperation is the growth of cross-border trade as public and private players promote territorial projects that may be economically advantageous. Bilateral commerce will operate as a forced multiplier; thus, both governments should increase two-way trade. This must be understood that the Buddhist perspective on India's cultural diplomacy can be used to develop ties with Myanmar. To build trust and friendship, it is necessary to build economic activities and bring together partners from both sides to co-create tourism experiences. A substantial body of research examines the relationship between locals' perceptions and their support for tourism development (e.g., Gursoy et al., 2010; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011; Baniya et al., 2018). It was observed that pilgrim tourism and people-to-people contact between nations can aid to improve bilateral diplomatic relations (Dada et al., 2022). However, the impact of cross-border tourism development on bilateral trade agreements and collaboration between or among neighboring nations is not well-documented empirically. It is predicted that the recent India-Myanmar border crossing accords will positively impact both tourism and trade and economic development. They might also be seen as indicating the strengthening ties between the two countries.

The study's main purpose was to empirically investigate the impact of cross-border tourism development on bilateral trade relations, cooperation, and peacebuilding between India and Myanmar as close neighbors. Cross-border collaboration between India and Myanmar is still in its infancy stage. The study claims that the development of cross-border tourism between India and Myanmar could mitigate the conflicts and promote understanding and peace. Community support can help to melt hostile relationships and can enhance cross-border cultural links and people-to-people contacts. Further, it is found that cross-border tourism can boost the economic development of border communities. People at the center need to shape bilateral mechanisms like the Joint Trade Committee's future relationships. India and Myanmar, both gateways to South Asia and Southeast Asia, should prioritize their bilateral relations more. Both countries must work together to promote cross-border tourism in order to increase bilateral trade and connectivity in the region, as well as market access, banking and financial cooperation, and tourist and security cooperation.

An institutionalized Track-2 communication mechanism between their think tanks and community organizations will strengthen bilateral trade, economic relations, and cross-border collaboration between the two nations.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present paper contributed to the existing pool of literature related to tourism and peace. Political stability between the neighboring nations strengthens trade and economic ties and improves the relationships of the parties involved. Unlike previous work on tourism and economic development, this study assessed border communities' perceptions of tourism's role in enhancing cross-border cooperation and peace by incorporating the mediation effect of community support. Further, the study provides insight that tourism has a role to play in advancing bilateral trade and peaceful relations between hostile countries by taking support of local communities. The increased cross-border tourism by involving local communities is expected to strengthen the mutual understanding and cooperation between the two nations. The establishment of cross-border tourism projects by India and Myanmar can be beneficial for alleviating poverty levels, mainly in the border regions. Community involvement in the decision-making process can help make better use of tourism resources. As two developing countries, their friendship and peacebuilding processes will promote regional integration among the South Asian countries. The study's findings are evocative for policymakers, practitioners, and destination marketing groups of divided nations.

There are some limitations to this study that present chances for future research. First, the proposed approach is tested only in a few places; therefore, the findings' generalizability may be limited. Future research can be conducted by taking the perception of other areas as the resident's views can vary from place to place. Second, the paper only analyzed the direct and mediating effects, future studies can be conducted to examine the moderating effects of some other variables. Finally, comparative studies can be performed by considering the Indian border regions of other neighboring countries.

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