

Article

Why Travel to Georgia? Motivations, Experiences, and Country's Image Perceptions of Wine Tourists

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Abstract: This study examined the wine tourists' perceptions of the country's image and the motivations and expectations of experiences in Georgia as a wine tourism destination. A survey of tourists in the most important wine region—Kakheti—resulted in 227 usable questionnaires. Using factor analyses, four dimensions were assigned to the country's hedonic and aesthetic related image. Based on the experience economy of Pine and Gilmore, two motivational and three experiential factors were identified. Implications for the country's branding strategy and managing the wine tourist's experience in Georgia are discussed.

Keywords: wine tourism; country image; experience economy; motivations; Georgia



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1. Introduction

1.1. Georgia as a Wine Country and Developments of Tourism and Wine Tourism

Wine has been cultivated in the Caucasus and Georgia for thousands of years. Wine is not only a drink that accompanies food to the Georgians; it is more religious, a ritual, and part of their culture and tradition [1]. The wines for toasts during the Georgian feast (supra) comprise Georgian culture's intangible part. Over the last six years, the Georgian wine industry has experienced rapid expansion and is experiencing a period of rediscovery, renewal, and growth [2,3].

From 2009 to 2012, Georgia attained one of the fastest tourism growths worldwide as the number of tourists increased from 1.5 million to 4.4 million [4]. In 2019, the number of international arrivals reached 9.4 million. Between 2012 and 2019, tourism income increased from USD 475 million to USD 4 billion, making 22.9% of the total GDP in 2019 [5,6]. To attract more high-yielding visitors, the tourism industry tends to improve niche areas with great potential in Georgia, particularly the winter season, wine, and medical and wellness tourism [7].

The competitive positioning of Georgia as a wine country is an important strategic issue for the Georgian government, and the government promotes wine regions as the country's leading tourism destinations very actively. The increasing size of wine production and the number of registered wineries directly relate to the country's growing number of visitors. In 2009, Georgia attracted 1.5 million visitors, and in 2018, 7.2 million tourists were attracted [5], while the size of the producing vineyards increased from 41,200 ha in 2007 [8] to 55,000 ha in 2018 [9]. Additionally, registered wineries have risen from 80 in 2006 to 961 in 2018 [2,3]. Most small wineries offer accommodation and wine-related tourism activities at their facilities, as the income from the wine tourism activities are substantial sources for households in rural areas. Therefore, it seems that a country's visitor number and tourism-related revenues depend upon the size of its wine production.

1.2. Country Image and Its Interaction with Wine Tourism

The notion that countries, regions, places, and other geographical entities behave similarly to a brand and affect consumer responses to a product is widely recognized, and this is very evident with wine [10–13]. The reputation or characteristic of the wine and perception (or belief) about wine is attributable to the country or region of origin. The region or country of origin of wine is multi-dimensional. It incorporates vineyards, wineries, other physical structures, natural landscapes and settings, people and heritage, culture, tradition, and architecture [14]. The evidence of how regions such as Bordeaux, Chianti, Napa Valley, the Duoro Valley, and Rioja have used their regional identity to enhance their competitive advantage [14] underlines the importance of adding the region or country's equity to the wine brands [10,12]. In research on wine regions of origin, the region and the wine's country are considered identical [15]. A region is shaped by local characteristics such as tradition, culture, or landscape [16].

Many agricultural products have been branded using their region or country of origin, conjuring up definite images or perceptions in the mind of consumers. Wine is even marketed by using the region of origin in most wine-producing countries where the regions are protected as intellectual property. The protective actions in the old and new world countries regarding the region of origin illustrate how a wine's provenance is important from a commercial viewpoint. Accordingly, more profound insight into how tourists perceive the country's image is significant [10], especially for Georgia, which actively attempts to attract tourists and improve the brand awareness of Georgian wine on international markets (besides Russia).

Measuring a country's image comprehensively and accurately as a wine tourism destination requires a better understanding of wine tourists' characteristics, motives, and expectations [17–19]. The wine tourist needs to be connected with the product origin through visitation to the country or region where the wine is produced [20]. Wine tourism is considered a complex relationship between the wine region or country as a tourist destination, wineries, and the consumer as a visitor [17]. Tourists are not a homogenous group; their behavior varies in different regions, countries, and cultures [21,22]. The diversity of tourism behavior results in the need to understand individual wine tourist motivations. For wine producers to fully benefit from wine tourism and to improve brand awareness and wine tourism and cellar door wine sales, they need to understand all extrinsic and intrinsic aspects impacting the behavior of visitors [21]. Understanding the motivation and expectations of wine tourists provides insights into why consumers desire to visit wine countries or regions [23] and how visitors' needs can be linked to the attributes of the wine country or region [20,24].

The desire of tourists to visit wine countries as tourism destinations is driven not only by the perception of the destination or country image but also by their motivational and exceptional strength that includes learning about wine, relaxation, exploration, and socialization [20]. Wine tourists appreciate authentic and notable experiences; they look for wine, wine harvests, vineyards, and cellars, as well as for historical and cultural values in iconic places [21,22]. Moreover, the wine tourism experience implies the aesthetic appreciation of the natural atmosphere, the cultural and historical context of the wine country or region, cuisine, hospitality, and the search for education, diversity, and authenticity [18,25,26]. Correia and Brito [27] argue that wine tourism is a territorial experience composed of tangible and intangible components. The authors consider intangible components, including traditions, authenticity, atmosphere, culture, and interaction. The producers, wine cellars, restaurants, landscapes, and tourism operators are tangible components. This finding indicates that intangible components are linked to the cultural and social roots of the region or country and the atmosphere. In contrast, tangible components are directly associated with the stakeholders of wine tourism activity, such as producers, wine cellars, and restaurants, among others. Thus, these two components must be intertwined to create positive dynamics in destinations for successful wine tourism [28]. The strong impact of the country or region's environment composing of culture, traditions, and nature, among

others, on wine tourists' experiences underlines the premise that an experiential research approach should involve the country or region's image analysis.

Therefore, to understand why people visit a country or region as a wine tourism destination, it is crucial to investigate the critical attributes of wine tourism experiences. When doing so, it is necessary to examine the perception of the country's image as a wine tourism destination within which this experience takes place [29,30]. In terms of conceptualizing the country's image, the current study adapted affective components of the country's image aspects, such as 'nature and landscape', 'culture', and 'people' [31]. Moreover, the current study used the experience economy framework of Pine and Gilmore [32] adapted by Rüdiger et al. [33] to study why wine tourists travel to Georgia and to understand the perceptions of the country's image. The studies by Bruwer et al. [20], Bruwer and Rueger-Muck [30], and Nicolau and Mas [34] show how tourist motivations and attributes of the countries or regions as tourism destinations interact. This is an approach of the current study for explaining the decisions through the perception of the country's characteristics and the personal motivations and expectations of the tourists visiting Georgia. There is a clear gap in knowledge in linking a country's image with motivations and expectations of the tourists. Very little research focused on linking a country or region's image [14,20,34–36] with motivations and expectations to the experiences of wine tourists.

One of the tenets of this study is that wine tourism involves not only visiting wineries and vineyards but is a culmination of a number of the experiences related to the surrounding environment, ambiance, atmosphere, architecture, domestic culture, traditional food, and local wine [17,32]. Additionally, this study is one of the first type in the wine tourism literature that validates the concept of experience economy proposed by Pine and Gilmore [32] from tourists' perspectives while assigning the items to each dimension based on factor analyses. The study focuses on these elements and underlines their importance to wineries and the country's marketing and tourism entities to incorporate these elements into branding strategies.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the study are to understand the nature of wine tourism's (travel) antecedents, such as the perceived characteristics of Georgia as a tourism destination, and to provide baseline information and a deepened understanding of the motivations and expectations of the experiences of visiting Georgia.

Knowing these factors would assist winery cellar doors and the wine industry by acting on the salient aspects of visitors' motivations and expectations to enhance the experience and, thus, induce a memorable impression on the visitor. This will, in turn, relate to post-visit brand awareness and generate future sales in the retail trade on international markets.

To operationalize the study, the following research questions were advanced:

RQ1. What are the perceptions of the country's image of Georgia among international tourists?

RQ2. What are the international tourists' motivations for visiting Georgia?

RQ3. What are the international tourists' expectations about the experiences of wine-related activities and wineries in Georgia?

2. Literature Framework

2.1. Country Image

Based on the theories of information processing in country-of-origin research, three effects explain the impact of the region or the country [37]. The cognitive effect emphasizes the informational value of the country's image, which is the so-called traditional hierarchy of effects. The affective effect focuses on consumers' emotional attachment to a country and the symbolic meaning of a country's image. The normative effect refers to the consumers' perceived proximity to the values and cultures of the country [38] that directly affect behaviors. Therefore, the country of origin is linked to the country's image, referring to the consumers' perceptions of products from a particular country [39]. Moreover, information

on the country of origin activates country stereotypes and affects product judgments and decision-making processes with respect to traveling to this country or purchasing products stemming from this country [40]. Accordingly, the country's image information reduces a complexity of information processing and decision heuristics [41].

Country and product dimensions are used to define the country's image. However, at the beginning of origin research, the origin-related impression values were summarized under the term country image without distinguishing the country and product-related dimensions [42]. The product-specific image of a country or region is a multi-dimensional construct predominantly determined by natural and anthropogenic attributes [31]. The natural attributes comprise the physical characteristics of a country or region. On the other hand, anthropogenic features refer to human capabilities and skills [43].

The constructed image of the wine-growing country-of-origin as a tourist destination includes emotional image dimensions [44], referring to the landscape and nature of Georgia. Beyond the landscape and travel attractiveness, the constructed country image consists of characteristics related to the culture and the people or the sympathy with the country's people due to their hospitality. The empirical study by Leitow [31] proves that "nature and landscape", "culture", and "people" are plausibly related and represent an affective attitude component.

2.2. The Motivation of the Wine Tourists

Hall et al. [22] describe a wine tourist as a regular visitor to wine events, wineries, and vineyards. A typical wine tourist is in their 30s, 40s, and 50s with medium to high income. A wine tourist regularly consumes wine with good wine knowledge. Charters and Ali-Knight [18] depict a wine tourist as a person who has already gained—in any form—a wine experience. This could be from media, literature, movies, or personal experiences. Most of the characteristics mentioned above are based on research on wine tourists in the "New World Countries"; therefore, the statements do not apply to other wine tourism regions. This can be seen in wine consumption's regional and cultural differences [45]. The motivation to travel is not necessarily dominated by wine—it can be extended to a bundle of motivational factors such as external and internal factors relevant to the decision-making process [45].

External factors can be referred to as characteristics connected with a concrete search for aims. This is further related to activities in a wine region, such as wine tastings, the purchase of wine, or wine tours. In contrast, internal factors refer mainly to experiencing relaxing holidays [46]. Other motivational factors for wine tourists are to gain knowledge, participate in cellar tours, meet winemakers, or eat at a wine estate [22,46].

The summaries mentioned in the current literature show that the definitions of wine motivation are individually adapted or changed, focusing on different approaches. This results in an almost incomparability of the other target market and consumer groups.

2.3. Expectations of the Experiences of Wine Tourists Using the Experience Economy

Hillmann [47] defines expectations as the basic concept of the sociological role theory, which determines all actors' actions, reactions, and entitlements in social relations. Luft [48] articulates that tourists' multiple expectations characterize touristic services (products) in wine tourism. It is widely reported that understanding a consumer's pre-purchase expectations is crucial to assessing his/her overall experiential value for products or services purchased [49]. Due to this nature, Pine and Gilmore [32] propose a concept of experience economy to address consumers' increasing demand and to discern their consumption behaviors [50].

The experience economy is a relatively young research field that deals with the new economic values of experiencing and its experience. Pine and Gilmore [32] define an experience economy as an experience-based delivery method of goods to provide a high level of customization specifically targeted to consumers' needs. The concept of the experience economy was developed out of the sight of firms, which optimized and differentiated their

goods and services as far as possible, reaching limits to differentiate from their competitors. The economy reached a point where goods and services are taken for granted and are not enough to be a competitive advantage. Successful operating companies generate higher prices for their products by emphasizing the value of the product characteristics and if they cause experiences with these characteristics for the consumers.

The four experience realms proposed by Pine and Gilmore [32] provide a concept to respond to consumers and develop experience-oriented offers. The concept is based on two continuous dimensions divided by an axis. The first horizontal dimension displays consumer participation, either active or passive. The right side is based on active participation—the consumer affects or co-created the staged experience, whereas, on the left, consumers do not affect their experience. The vertical axis indicates customers' connection with the experience, which can also be described as the involvement of consumers. The extremes range from absorption to immersion of consumers. Absorption involves the mental participation of consumers regarding the experience. On the other hand, immersion means being physically engaged in the experience. These combined factors lead to four different realms, as shown in Figure 1.

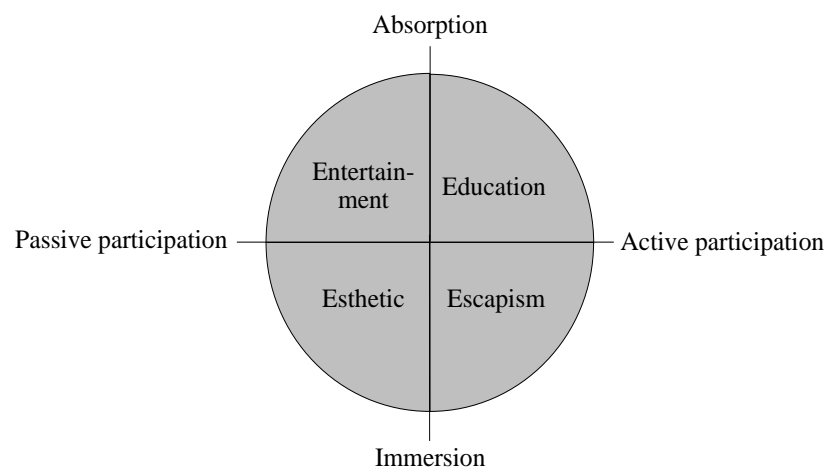


Figure 1. Four dimensions of Pine and Gilmore. Source: own graphic based on Pine and Gilmore (1999).

Additional services in general and, more specifically, experiences crucially enhance the product. This means that the characteristic of products in inducing experiences increases the utility and, therefore, the overall utility of a product. Similar to a theatre play, experiences are produced by memorable and communicable actions [32].

The more positive (or the more negative) an experience is, the stronger (or weaker) the attachment to the experience environment, such as the touristic region [12]. A unique (purchase) experience, such as a direct sale at a winery with personal consulting and a wine tasting with the winemaker, can increase customer loyalty and emotional attachment [51]. Emotions are crucial for the consumption and attachment to products and brands [52].

Therefore, the present study examines the product-related image of the country of origin (Georgia) as a wine-growing country. In addition, the dimensions that underpin the nature and landscape, culture, and characteristics of the inhabitants [31] are included, applying the concept of the experience economy.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The population of interest included visitors spending at least one day in the Georgian wine region, Kakheti. Kakheti is the most significant wine-growing region, producing 68% of the country's wine. The most prominent wineries and those with hotel facilities are located in the region. Kakheti plays a significant part in Georgian wine history, not

only for wine growing but also for education and research. Even in the Kakheti region's 1120 founded academy of Ikalto, viticulture and traditional winemaking are taught [53].

For the topic under investigation, it was essential to include all highly involved consumers and those with a more distant interest in wine. That the respondents visited the wine region does not necessarily indicate their high involvement in wine. As wine represents a significant part of Georgian culture and traditions, visiting wine regions and wineries in Georgia is mostly part of their visiting schedule to explore Georgian culture. Pen-and-paper surveys were distributed to visitors at two wineries in the mentioned region. Since these wineries with hotel complexes receive the highest number of visitors annually compared to other wineries in Kakheti, they were used as study sites to gather data. Respondents were selected by using a simple random sampling procedure to ensure an equal probability for all visitors to those two wineries to be included in the sample. A total of 227 completed surveys were collected and used for analysis. The research project was designed and conducted in September 2019 before the pandemic and the conflict situation in the region.

3.2. Measures and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part covered socio-demographic characteristics, the length of stay, and general wine consumption behavior. The second one was geared towards assessing the perception of Georgia's country image (RQ1). Ghvanidze's [41] validated scales were used to operationalize this construct. The third part included the questions related to the motivation to visit Georgia (RQ2) and expectations of wine-related activities (RQ3a) and wineries in Georgia (RQ3b). The specific validated scales on the motivation and expectations of the experiences of wine-related activities of Pine and Gilmore [32], adapted by Rüdiger et al. [33], were employed to guide the design of motivation and expectation measures. Some items were adapted to the Georgian reality, and others were newly developed. New measures were developed for the expectations of the experiences of wineries.

The items related to country image and motivation were worded as statements. Participants could express their agreement levels on a Likert scale between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The expectations of the experiences were rated by respondents on a five-point scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The development of the perceived image measures was grounded in the theoretical framework (affective country image). Factor analyses enable researchers to collect an important type of validity evidence, explore or confirm the relationships between survey items, and identify the total number of dimensions represented on the survey [54]. Therefore, the factor analysis with varimax rotation was applied firstly to validate the concept of experience economy by Pine and Gilmore [32] that was adapted in a qualitative research study by Rüdiger et al. [33]. Secondly, to determine the underlying structures of the newly developed scale of the expectations of the experiences to wineries, the measure was subjected to the principal factoring with varimax rotation. The same factor analytical procedures were performed to generate factor structures for the country's image. Finally, factor analysis was performed for scale-based items related to country image, motivation, and expectations of the experience items to reduce the number of variables and to detect the relationship structure between variables.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Sample Description

The overall sample consisted of slightly more males (54.6%), which is in unity with the studies of Bruwer et al. [55], Famularo et al. [56], and the National Statistics Office of Georgia [57] that males are more frequent wine drinkers having a higher interest in wine.

Regarding age, the respondents in the age group between 26 and 35 were marginally skewed (28.2%), while study participants over 46 years represented the largest group of 55% (Table 1). Bruwer and Lesschaeva [17] reported that the Generation X and older age

group had the most significant representation among visitors in the Niagara wine region in Ontario, Canada.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and wine consumption.

Socio-Demographic Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	124	54.6
Female	103	45.4
Age (years)		
18–25	15	6.6
26–35	64	28.2
36–45	22	9.7
46–55	31	13.7
56–65	39	17.2
66 years and older	56	24.7
Education level		
High school and vocational school	65	28.6
Undergraduate degree (Bachelor's degree)	43	18.9
Post-graduate degree (Master's/PhD degree)	119	52.4
Frequency of wine consumption		
Several times a week	106	46.7
About once a week	73	32.2
About once a month	28	12.3
Rarely	17	7.5
Never	3	1.3

N (number of surveys) = 227.

There was a noticeable trend of higher educated consumers in the sample, with more than half of the respondents reporting post-graduate degrees (52.4%). Almost 80% of the respondents were heavy drinkers, consuming wine from several times to once a week (Table 1). Bruwer et al. [10] confirmed the high level of education of wine tourists, while the high educational status with a high level of wine consumption in the research of Famularo et al. [56] was confirmed.

In total, respondents came from 24 different countries. Over the half of the respondents indicated their place of residence in Germany. Other most frequent countries of living were the UK (8%), Switzerland (7%), and Austria (5.3%). The predominant number of German wine tourists can be explained by the survey conducted in the winery founded by a German investor in the wine region, Kakheti. Overall, the most significant number of visitors, at 20.1%, come from the Russian Federation, followed by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey, covering 84% of all international tourists in Georgia [5,6].

Over 65% of the respondents stayed in Georgia between 5 and 10 days, while most (93.4%) indicated spending less than five days in the wine region of Kakheti. These results are congruent with the studies of Alant and Bruwer [58] in Australia and Rüdiger et al. [33] in Germany that wine tourists travel for a day or take overnight trips to wine regions.

4.2. Perceived Country Image of Georgia

The results of the factor analysis were grounded on the following approach: The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of the sampling adequacy value between 0.57 and 0.74 and the significance level of Bartlett's test of sphericity at 0.000 suggested that the variables are related, and factor analysis is appropriate for detecting the structure of all factors. The factor analysis with orthogonal varimax rotation suggested given numbers of factor solutions by retaining only the factors with an eigenvalue larger than one. All factor loading scores were above 0.5, indicating a good correlation between the items and the factor groups to which they belong. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha coefficients between

0.45 and 0.82 indicated moderate to high levels of internal consistency of the tested items for constructing composite measures.

There is a wide range of different qualitative descriptors used by scholars to interpret alpha values calculated. The authors describe alpha values between 0.45 and 0.98 as acceptable, those between 0.45 and 0.96 as sufficient [59], and those between 0.50 and 0.70 as moderate [60]. This diversity of terms suggests no consensus on the most appropriate labels for describing alpha values. Additionally, there is no clear hierarchy within the range of terms, and they seem to be arbitrary, e.g., not satisfactory overlaps with sufficient and acceptable [59]. This indicates that a threshold of acceptability for alpha values considered only as a rule of thumb [61] is not always seen that lower alpha values should be taken as an indication of an unsatisfactory instrument.

Bretz and McClary [62], van Griethuijsen et al. [63], and Lamb et al. [64] suggest that Cronbach's alpha cannot be seen as a measure of a scale or instrument per se, as it applies to the particular sample responding to a particular occasion and a number of the items. van Griethuijsen et al. [63], p. 589, justified alpha values of 0.50 and 0.45 by arguing that "slightly increasing the number of items would lead to acceptable values for Cronbach's alpha".

Finally, there are limited grounds to adopt a heuristic that Cronbach's alpha should reach 0.70 for an instrument to have an acceptable level of self-consistency. However, this rule of thumb is followed by many scholars [59]. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha values below 0.70 in the current study indicate an acceptable level of self-consistency in terms of including the instruments in the factor analysis.

RQ1 examined the perceived country image of Georgia. Participants evaluated a statement reflecting various dimensions of the country image of Georgia. To confirm the measurement of the perceived image, a multi-item scale on a five-point Likert scale was applied. Reliability analysis on the four items of the country image was performed. The mean scores of all the items above 4.0 coincide with the respondent's perception of Georgia's image that the country is known as "a cultural nation" with its "long tradition as a wine-growing country" and a "hospitable country" with its "charming landscape and nature" (Table 2). These results are congruent with the findings by Ghvanidze [41] that Georgia was perceived by German wine consumers as a country with an interesting and charming landscape and nature, with hospitable people, and a cultural nation. The mentioned study confirms the image of Georgia as a traditional wine-growing country.

Table 2. Results of the factor analysis for the country image.

Factors	Factor Loading	Mean	Standard Deviation	Grand Mean	Eigen Value	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance Explained
Hedonic related country image				4.26	2.95	0.67	56.55%
Georgia is known for its hospitality	0.90	4.33	0.85				
Georgia is known for its long tradition as a wine-growing country	0.73	4.19	0.84				
Aesthetic related country image				4.25	1.05	0.60	17.28%
Georgia is known for its charming landscape and nature	0.92	4.06	0.75				
Georgia is known as a cultural nation	0.65	4.44	0.71				
Total variance explained							73.83%

N (number of surveys) = 227.

Four items were initially subjected to principal component analysis with varimax rotation to identify the structure of the country's image. In an examination of factor loadings, by retaining only the factors with an eigenvalue larger than one, a two-factor solution was generated that logically supported the contextual characteristics related to the country image of Georgia. All factor-loading scores were higher than 0.6, indicating a good correlation between the items and the factor group to which they belong. High

factor loadings and high levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.67$, $\alpha = 0.60$) warranted the construction of three composite measures. The two factors accounted for 73.83% of the total variance.

Factor 1 resulted in high loadings on items that measured Georgia's image, known for its "hospitality" and "long tradition as a wine-growing country". Factor 1 was thus labeled "*Hedonic related image*" [17,21]. The perception of the country image of Georgia is of the hedonic nature of the visitation context, as hospitality related to the people living in and around the destination was highly rated. This points to the strength of personal attention to visitors' needs and motivations of wine tourists seeking hedonic experiences within the cultural, traditional, and natural environment of wine countries and images [17,21].

Items in the second factor-grouped items associated with the image of Georgia known for its "charming landscape and nature" and "cultural nation". Factor 2 was labeled the "*aesthetic related image*" (Table 2). According to Nohl [65], aesthetic related images comprise four levels of aesthetic cognition: perceptual cognition, when senses, viewing, hearing, and smell are involved; expressive, when feelings and emotions are associated with the region; symbolics includes ideas and imaginations created in the viewer's mind [10].

The results confirm that the country image is a multidimensional construct [66] that includes cognitive and affective components [67]. The image dimensions of Georgia tested in the study "seduced" the visitor into engaging in total experience and forming a cognitive and affective perception. Therefore, the destination's image (country or wine region) is considered an "attitudinal concept comprising the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a tourist holds of a destination" [68], (p. 638). This means that the destination image is more than an experience of landscape and is a function of culture and people who live in and around the destination wine country or region [10].

4.3. Motivation to Visit Georgia

RQ2 examined the motivation of tourists to visit Georgia. Four items with a mean above 4.0 on the five-point scale suggest that the main motivations to visit Georgia are "to experience local cuisine/food" ($M = 4.30$), "to learn more about local heritage and history" ($M = 4.19$), and "to experience nature" ($M = 4.09$). Since the survey was conducted in Georgia's most important wine region, the respondents reported being least motivated by the "Black Sea coast" ($M = 2.19$) when visiting Georgia.

Further studies in the area of wine tourism demonstrate that experiencing local food and wine and holidays are the primary purposes of the visitors to wine regions in Canada [17], Australia [10,56], and South Africa [21]. The current study's results are congruent with Bruwer and Lessaeva [17], Bruwer and Alant [21], and Famularo et al. [56]; recreational and sporting activities were not the main priorities for visiting wine regions.

The KMO index of 0.65 and Bartlett's sphericity test (0.000) justified performing factor analysis. An internal consistency examination resulted in two items, "to experience the Black Sea coast" and "to socialize", that were excluded from the factor analysis. Consequently, the KMO index improved to 0.68 and the total variance from 45.81% to 55.19%. All factor-loading scores of remained seven items were higher than 0.50, indicating a good correlation between the items. The total variance was a sufficient value for this model (Table 3).

Of the two identified factors, "*Edutainment*" [32] with wine, cuisine, and heritage scored the highest grand mean and is considered the most important motivating factor to visit Georgia. The items with the highest loadings on factor 1, "to learn more about Georgian wine" ($M = 3.97$) and "to experience the Georgian feast tradition" ($M = 3.67$), correspond with the respondents' perception of Georgia's image as a country with a long wine-growing tradition. Following Pine and Gilmore [32], education involves the active participation of the individual or tourists while actively engaging the mind to increase knowledge. This means, on the one hand, that by learning more about Georgian wine and experiencing Georgian feasts, cuisine, heritage, and history, tourists "*absorb*" experiences actively. On the other hand, visitors "*entertain*" while passively "*absorbing*" experiences

through their senses. This means that an educational experience is provided simultaneously with pleasure. Therefore, factor 1 was labeled “edutainment” as the activities united under this dimension connote the experiences of “*straddling the realms of education and entertainment*” ([32], p. 32).

Factor 2 is labeled “*entertainment*” as passive participation comprising the items “to experience nature” ($M = 4.09$), “to relax and unwind” ($M = 3.65$), and “for recreational/sporting activities” ($M = 2.58$). Among these three items, “recreational/sporting activities” achieved the lowest mean, indicating that respondents are less motivated to visit Georgia for recreation and sports (Table 3). They can relax and unwind while experiencing nature without active physical engagements. This indicates that visitors are entertained when they passively “*absorb*” experiences through their senses [32].

Table 3. Results of the factor analysis for the motivation to visit Georgia.

Factors	Factor Loading	Mean	Standard Deviation	Grand Mean	Eigen Value	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance Explained
Edutainment (passive, active participation)				4.03	6.17	0.63	31.84%
To learn more about Georgian wine	0.75	3.97	0.91				
To experience the Georgian feast tradition	0.72	3.67	0.94				
To experience local cuisine/food	0.69	4.30	0.79				
To learn more about local heritage and history	0.58	4.19	0.77				
Entertainment (passive participation)				3.44	1.96	0.68	23.35%
To experience nature	0.82	4.09	1.06				
To relax and unwind	0.76	3.65	0.92				
For recreational/sporting activities	0.74	2.58	1.13				
Total variance explained							55.19%

N (number of surveys) = 227.

4.4. Expectations of the Experiences of Wine-Related Activities and Wineries in Georgia

RQ3a examined tourists’ expectations of the experiences of wine-related activities.

The mean scores of the expectations of experiences’ measures for the country Georgia are above 3.0 on a five-point scale, indicating that more than half of the suggested variables have above average importance in instigating the experiences of Georgia as a wine country. The highest priority among the expectations of the experiences has “learn more about wine” ($M = 4.18$), “learn more about wine production” ($M = 4.01$), and “eating at the restaurant in the winery” ($M = 3.78$). The least important are “wine tasting seminars” ($M = 3.58$) and “meet wine growers” ($M = 3.52$).

The results are congruent with Bruwer and Alant’s [21] and Famularo et al.’s [56] findings that meeting winemakers was not a highly ranked priority for visitors to wine regions and cellar doors. Additionally, participants demonstrated the lowest expectation in terms of experiences related to the physical activities in a vineyard, such as biking, Nordic walking, and hiking (Table 4).

On the one hand, from a motivational viewpoint, it appears that the visitors to Georgia are mostly “specialist” wine tourists [21,69], as the highest-ranked motivational reasons were mostly wine-related. On the other hand, from an experiential viewpoint, these activities and those related to engagements with the atmosphere, nature, culture, heritage, and cuisine are mainly pleasure-seeking and hedonic. The visitors in Georgia are also “generalist wine tourists” [21,70].

Three factors account for 64.36% of the cumulative variance (Table 4). In Factor 1, “*escapism*” as active participation with the lowest mean of 2.18 out of the three factors identified indicates the lowest importance of “hiking” ($M = 2.02$) and even with “a winemaker in a vineyard” ($M = 1.67$), “Nordic walking in a vineyard” ($M = 2.38$), and “biking through a vineyard” ($M = 2.44$). Furthermore, respondents do not expect to participate in the harvest. These activities are related to the “*escapist experience*” involving active immersion while tourists actively participate in an immersive environment. They affect their performance and experiences [32].

Table 4. Results of the factor analysis for expectations of experiences with respect to wine-related activities in Georgia.

Factors	Factor Loading	Mean	Standard Deviation	Grand Mean	Eigen Value	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance Explained
Escapism (active participation)				2.18	9.17	0.82	38.03%
Biking through a vineyard	0.83	2.44	1.23				
Nordic walking in a vineyard	0.81	2.38	1.22				
Hiking in a vineyard	0.79	2.02	1.09				
Participating in the harvest	0.64	2.41	1.28				
Hiking with a winemaker	0.62	1.67	1.01				
Education (active participation)				3.67	2.30	0.82	16.45%
Learn more about wine	0.80	4.18	0.99				
Meet winegrowers	0.77	3.52	1.19				
Learn more about wine production	0.77	4.01	1.00				
Wine tasting seminars	0.77	3.58	1.26				
Wine events / festivals	0.54	3.04	1.29				
Esthetic (passive participation)				3.46	0.53	0.62	9.89%
Dining at a restaurant in the winery	0.85	3.78	1.11				
Accommodation in the winery	0.69	3.14	1.30				
Total variance explained							64.36%

N (number of surveys) = 227.

Factor 2 showed high loadings on items that measured the expectation to improve wine knowledge by “meeting with wine growers”, participating in “wine tasting seminars”, and “wine events and festivals”. This factor was thus labeled “*education*” as active participation. The listed activities inform the tourists and increase their knowledge while actively engaging their minds [32]. Of the three factors identified, “education” scored the highest grand mean and is considered the most important of expectation factors.

Factor 3 received the second-highest grand mean. This factor grouped the items associated with dining and accommodation in the wineries and was assigned to the factor “*esthetic*” as passive participation. In esthetic experiences, the individuals “*immerse*” themselves in the environment with little or no effect. This means that they remain passive and leave the environment, but not themselves, essentially untouched [32].

Georgia’s unique geography, including alpine and subtropical zones, has created an enviable culinary tradition. Cultural influences caused by the turbulent history of Georgia and being once the crossroad of trade between Asia and Europe have led to a rich native cuisine [71]. Therefore, Georgian cuisine is the “coalescence of cultures” on a plate. Tourists visiting Georgia are interested in the local gastronomic culture. On the one hand, they want to be introduced to the local dishes and, on the other hand, they want to participate in the culinary processes of creating the authentic taste of local dishes. Georgian food and dining help tourists feel the country emotionally and “penetrate” the country’s culture. Dining in the Georgian tradition integrates sensory, cultural, and social experiences [72].

RQ3b examined tourists’ expectations of the experiences of wineries in Georgia. The mean scores of the tested seven items above 3.4 on a five-point scale indicate that more than half of the suggested variables investigate expectations of wineries. The highest score among these items shows those related to traditional food and architecture. The three factors accounted for 64.92% of the total variance (Table 5).

The factor “wellness” is the second most crucial factor encompassing the items “a winery with a hotel complex should have an outdoor swimming pool” ($M = 3.09$), and “... offer wellness (e.g., wine and spa)” ($M = 3.13$). The factor “modern” groups the items that measured the modern image of the wineries reflected in “modern architecture” and “European dishes”. This last factor, with a mean score of 2.86, indicates the minor importance of three factors related to the expectations of the experiences to the winery.

The third and most crucial factor is “tradition”, with a mean score of 4.03. This factor grouped items associated not only with the “traditional food” ($M = 3.45$) offered by a restaurant in the winery but also with “an evening of preparation of traditional Georgian dishes” ($M = 3.75$) offered by a winery. Furthermore, the factor “tradition” included the item “a winery should be built with traditional architecture” ($M = 3.87$), thus reflecting the respondents’ expectation of a bundle of services coherent with the winery’s appearance, namely traditional architecture (Table 4). These results are in unity with the perceptions of the country’s image of Georgia and the motivations and expectations of the experiences related to the culture, traditions, local food, feast, heritage, and history. Figure 2 presents interrelationships between wine tourists’ motivation and their expectations within the frame of the experience economy.

Table 5. Results of the factor analysis of expectations of experiences with respect to wineries in Georgia.

Factors	Factor Loading	Mean	Standard Deviation	Grand Mean	Eigen Value	Cronbach’s Alpha	Variance Explained
Wellness				3.11	3.47	0.79	31.43%
A winery with a hotel complex should have an outdoor swimming pool	0.89	3.09	1.15				
A winery with a hotel complex should offer wellness (e.g., wine and spa)	0.88	3.13	1.10				
Modern				2.86	2.02	0.45	18.09%
A winery should incorporate modern architecture	0.86	3.09	1.08				
A restaurant in the winery should offer European dishes	0.63	2.63	1.127				
Tradition				4.03	1.52	0.45	15.40%
A winery should offer an evening of preparation of traditional Georgian dishes	0.51	3.75	0.99				
A restaurant in the winery should offer traditional food	0.79	4.45	0.74				
A winery should be built with traditional architecture	0.71	3.87	0.96				
Total variance explained							64.92%

N (number of surveys) = 227.

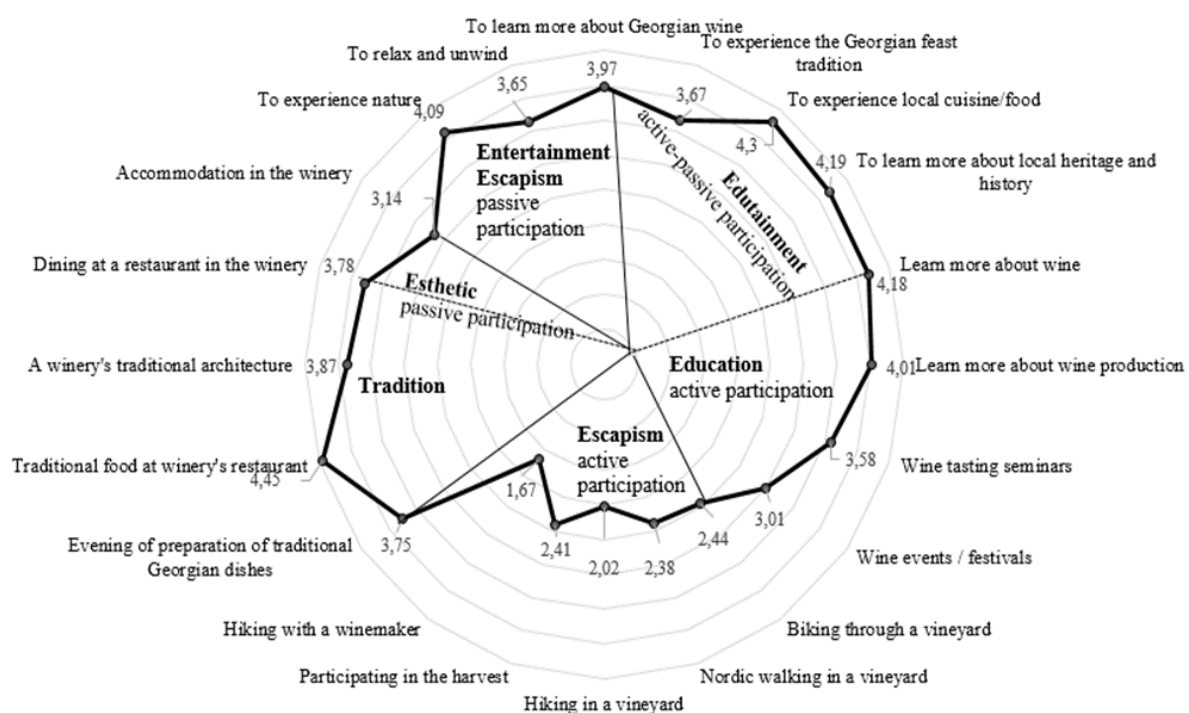


Figure 2. Interrelationships between motivation and expectations among wine tourists.

5. Conclusions, Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The nature of wine tourism and the motivations and experiences of wine tourists are diverse in relation to the countries or regions of the wine due to their cultural and traditional peculiarities. Accordingly, the research approach to a country's image as a wine tourism destination requires a research approach adapted for the country. It differs from the generic approaches used in mainstream country-of-origin studies. This study used an attribute-based approach based on a multi-dimensional construct composed of cognitive and affective components adapted to the peculiarities of Georgia as a wine country and wine tourism destination. Four dimensions of the country image were assigned to the country's hedonic and aesthetic related image. The results demonstrate that Georgia is primarily perceived as a cultural nation with a long wine-growing tradition. The charming landscape and nature and the hospitable people in the country make Georgia attractive for wine tourists.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated that adopting the motivational and experiential view embedded within the experience economy of Pine and Gilmore [32] yields a richness of perspectives to conceptual and theory-building research in wine tourism. The motivations and expectations involving active mental participation far outweigh those involving the active physical involvement of wine tourists to experience Georgia as a wine country. They are interested in improving their knowledge about local heritage and history, generally on wine and Georgian wine, primarily by meeting wine growers and attending wine festivals and tastings. The motivation to experience local cuisine in combination with Georgian wine is expected through the evening of the preparation of traditional Georgian dishes and experiencing traditional food in the winery's restaurant.

The expectation of the tourists in experiencing local tradition and culture is correlated with their expectations on the traditional architecture of the winery involving outdoor swimming and wellness offers that comprise wine and a spa.

The tourists visiting wine regions in Georgia do not expect sporting activities such as hiking, Nordic walking, biking in the vineyard, participation in the harvest, or hiking with a winemaker. However, the experience of meeting winegrowers and attending wine tastings, events, and festivals is expected.

The results supported previous studies that show that wine tourism should primarily be a part of holidays that enhance visitors' experiences. The visitors to wine regions aim not only to taste and purchase wine but also to have other motivational purposes of being educated and entertained. These are crucial factors for understanding the individuals' primary motives to visit a wine region. It is evident that the needs of wine tourists for stimulation and gratification by engaging in a total experience include pleasure-seeking and, therefore, are of a hedonic nature [10,21].

5.2. Managerial Implications

The main implication of this study's findings for Georgia as a wine country and its wine regions and individual winery cellar doors lies in a more compelling destination management and country branding strategy [17,21,73]. The study's results imply that certain country elements are more effective in marketing, specifically those related to nature, landscape, culture, and traditions. Hospitable people living in Georgia are accustomed to the hedonic values and partially related aesthetic perceptions of the country's image. However, other essential aspects impact visitors' overall experiences. Marketing institutions should strive to present promotional messages that are well balanced in terms of emphasizing the county elements and wine-related educational, entertaining, esthetic, and overall hedonic elements of the experience in the wine regions of Georgia.

A deepened understanding of winery visitors and the intention and ability to market Georgia as a traditional wine-growing country is of the utmost importance for wineries to be successful, and this applies not only at the local level but also on international markets. The offers of wineries, the traditional architecture, spa, restaurants with traditional food,

and an evening of preparing traditional Georgian dishes, as well as accommodation in the wineries, are important elements in the total context of wine tourism businesses in the wine regions in Georgia. As these elements impact the physical environment, they can, therefore, be utilized as a unique selling point for wineries.

Regional stakeholders, wineries, the Georgian national tourism association, and tourist guides should collaborate to create a stronger country brand image that will lead to more powerful exposure on a larger market scale. Once an image is formed, a brand identity can be established and linked to a marketing strategy of branding the country and wine regions [17,56].

This study also identified the importance of a winery's well-trained staff. There is a high need to develop strategies to integrate winery staff with visitors in order to better inform and educate about wine generally and Georgian wine specifically and to encourage participation in a wide variety of wine information activities offered by wineries. Correctly implementing these strategies would help develop a sense of identity and recall among tourists, providing stronger relationships for wineries and the wine region in building their brand image, destination image, and exposure [56].

5.3. Limitations

The research was conducted on tourists who visited the most prominent Georgian Wine Region—Kakheti—who are frequent wine drinkers. Moreover, this is a limitation because similar information on non-wine drinkers who also visited the region was not obtained. Additionally, data collection occurred in two wineries. One of the wineries had a German founder, and the tourists that were accommodated there were Germans. Therefore, most respondents were of German nationality. Research in other wine tourism environments (wineries and regions) should be conducted to expand on results and for comparative purposes. Georgia's specific regional and winery characteristics as a wine tourism destination could have skewed visitors' experiences, motivations, and expectations. The research focused only on visitors to the wine region, and non-visitors who might have somewhat similar or vastly different perceptions of the country's image, motivations, and expectations were excluded.

5.4. Recommendations for Further Research

More consumer research on the perceptions of a country's image and motivations and expectations, including non-visitors, is needed to permit the proper positioning of Georgia as a wine tourism destination. The relationship between country's image perceptions and motivations and expectations should be further examined. A clear, adequate understanding of the symbiosis of various tourist motivations and experiences and how they relate to the perception of the country's image will assist wine tourism marketers and wineries in maximizing visitation experiences for wine tourists and their service providers.

The concepts of the experience economy of Pine and Gilmore [32] adapted and validated in this study should be tested in other wine tourism environments while including non-visitors to determine its consistency across regions and countries. Wine tourists can be segmented with respect to the derived factors of their motivations and expectations of experiences. The segmentation study could be broadened by using wine knowledge and involvement. The segmentation approach developed could be explored in more detail by examining the consumer's interaction in seeking wine information, wine knowledge, and wine tourism. Insights from the segmentation of wine tourists will enable wineries in distinguishing diverse consumer segments and in developing services tailored to each segment. The comprehensive segmentation approach would explore aspects of wine information that consumers seek and the area of wine knowledge consumers desire to pursue. Reviewing the level and type of knowledge consumers expect from winery personnel would also provide valuable practical insights [20,56].

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