

Tbilisi 2022 Abstract Submission

Title

Why travel to Georgia? - The motivations, experiences, and country image perceptions of the wine tourists

I want to submit an abstract for:

Conference Presentation

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Keywords

Wine tourism, country image, experience economy, motivations, country-of-origin, Georgia.

Research Question

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

RQ2. What are the tourists' motivations to visit Georgia?

RQ3. What are the tourists' expectations of wine-related activities and

Methods

Factor analysis; the principal component analysis with orthogonal varimax rotation.

Results

Four dimensions of the country image were assigned to the hedonic and aesthetic-related image of Georgia. Five motivational and experiential factors were identified: edutainment and entertainment, escapism, education, and esthetic.

Abstract

The competitive positioning of Georgia as a wine country is an important strategic issue for the Georgian government which is marketing the wine regions as the country's leading tourism destinations very actively. The increasing size of wine production and the number of registered wineries appear to directly relate to the growing number of visitors the country receives. In 2009 Georgia attracted 1.500.049 and in 2018 7.203.350 tourists (National statistics of Georgia, 2019), while the size of the producing vineyards increased from 41.200 ha in 2007 (DWVG) to 55.000 ha in 2018 (OIV statistics, 2019). Additionally, the number of registered wineries has risen from 80 in 2006 to 961 in 2018 (GNW in Granik, 2019; Ghvanidze et al., 2020). Most of the small wineries offer accommodation and wine-related tourism activities in their facility, as the income from the wine tourism activities are substantial sources for the households in the rural area.

The protective actions in the old and new world countries in terms of the region of origin illustrate how wine's provenance is important from a commercial viewpoint. Accordingly, deeper insight into how tourists perceive the country's image is of high importance (Bruwer et al., 2014), especially for Georgia, the country that attempts actively to attract tourists and improve the brand awareness of Georgian wine on the international markets (besides Russia).

To comprehensively and accurately measure a country's image as a wine tourism destination requires a better understanding of wine tourists' characteristics, motives, and expectations (Getz & Brown, 2006). The wine tourist feels a need to be connected with the product origin through visitation of the country or the region from where the wine is produced (Bruwer et al., 2017). Wine tourism is considered the complex relationship between the wine region or country as a tourist destination, wineries, and consumer as a visitor (Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012). The diversity of tourism behavior roots the need to understand the individual wine tourist motivations. For wine producers to fully benefit from wine tourism, 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 (Bruwer & Alant, 2009). Understanding the motivation and expectation of the wine tourists provide insights into why consumers desire to visit wine countries or regions (Alebaiki & Lakovidou, 2011) and how the visitors' needs can be linked to the attributes of the wine country or region (Prayag & Ryan, 2011; Bruwer et al., 2017).

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 (Bruwer & Lesschaeve, 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Additionally, this study is one of the first research in the wine tourism area that validated the concept of experience economy by Pine & Gilmore (1999) from the tourists' perspective while assigning the items to each dimension based on factor analysis. The study focuses on these elements and underlines their importance not only to wineries but also to the countries' marketing and tourism entities to incorporate these elements into the country's branding strategy.

The population of interest was visitors spending at least one day in the Georgian wine region Kakheti. For the topic under investigation, it was important to include all kinds of consumers high involved and those with a more distant interest in wine. Pen-and-paper surveys were distributed to visitors at two wineries in the mentioned region. A total of 227 completed surveys were collected and used for analysis.

The nature of wine tourism and the motivations and experiences of the wine tourists are diverse in relationship with the countries or regions of the wine due to their cultural and traditional peculiarities. Accordingly, the research approach to the country's image as a wine tourism destination requires a research approach adopted by the country. It differs from the generic approaches used in the mainstream country of origin studies. This study used an attribute-based approach based on a multidimensional construct consisting of cognitive and affective components that were 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 tradition of wine-growing. The charming landscape and nature and the hospitable people in the country make Georgia attractive to wine tourists.

Four dimensions of the country image were assigned to the hedonic and aesthetic-related image of Georgia. The

results demonstrate that Georgia is primarily perceived as a cultural nation, with a long tradition of wine-growing. The charming landscape and nature and the hospitable people in the country make Georgia attractive to wine tourists.

Furthermore, this study demonstrated that adopting the motivational and experiential view embedded within the experience economy of Pine & Gilmore (1999) yields the richness of perspectives to both conceptual and theory-building research in the wine tourism field. Five motivational and expectational factors were identified: Edutainment (passive active participation) and Entertainment (passive participation), Escapism (active participation), Education (active participation), and Esthetic (passive participation).

The motivations and expectations involving active mental participation far outweigh those involving active physical participation of the wine tourists to experience Georgia as a wine country. They are interested in improving their knowledge about local heritage and history, generally wine and Georgian wine, primarily through 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 preparation of traditional Georgian dishes, dining traditional food in the winery's restaurant.

The expectation of the tourists to experience local tradition and culture is correlated with their expectation of the traditional architecture of the winery with outdoor swimming and wellness offers composing wine and spa. The tourists visiting wine regions in Georgia do not expect sports activities such as hiking, Nordic walking, biking in the vineyard, participation in the harvest, or hiking with a winemaker. However, the experience of meeting the winegrowers, attending wine tastings, wine events, and festivals is expected.

The results supported the previous studies that wine tourism should be primarily considered part of the holidays that enhance visitors' experiences. The visitors to wine regions aim not only to taste and purchase wine but also to have other motivation purposes of educating and entertaining, which are crucial factors to understanding the individuals' primary motives to visit a wine region. The needs of the wine tourists for stimulation and gratification through engaging in a total experience are pleasure-seeking and therefore of a hedonic nature.

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 the more effective destination management and country branding strategy. The study results imply the more effective marketing of the country elements, specifically those related to the nature, landscape, culture, and traditions as country brand elements. The marketing institutions should strive to present promotional messages that are well balanced in terms of emphasizing the country elements and wine-related educational, entertaining, esthetic, and overall hedonic elements of the experience.

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