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Determining Factors for the Wine Tourist Involvement and its Impact on the Image of the Destination: The Case of Kakheti, Georgia

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Master of Science in Tourism Development and Culture

Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree

Supervisor:

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2nd Advisor:

Prof. Carmel Cassar

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Remember, dreams only stay dreams until they finally come true!

ABSTRACT

The attractiveness of wine tourism lies in presenting a set of activities that are centered around the core product, but that go beyond simple wine tasting and allow visitors to immerse themselves in a holistic experience. Wine tourism as an emerging tourism product has enabled the development of mostly rural regions, with fewer tourist resources, allowing the leverage of its brand. The recognition of the potential of wine tourism has aroused the interest of both world-renowned wine regions and countries, as well as those that, despite producing wines for centuries, had remained “dormant” in terms of tourism. The present study was carried out in the main wine-making region, Kakheti-one of the world's most pioneering wine countries, where wine production is believed to have originated. Kakheti wine region combines its cultural heritage with a rich and diverse gastronomy, also offering recreational and educational activities during the visit. The study aims to analyze the influence of seven dimensions of the wine tourism experience on tourists’ involvement with the wine region. Additionally, it seeks to understand the impact of this involvement on the image of the destination, Georgia. The study presents an original conceptual model, where four research hypotheses are tested. Data were collected through an online questionnaire designed from a systematic review of the literature on the phenomenon of wine tourism. The results demonstrate that a set of experiential factors influence involvement with the region, while this involvement positively contributes to the perception of the destination's brand image.

Keywords: wine tourism, involvement, brand image, Kakheti, Georgia

JEL Classification System: Z32 (Tourism and Development); Z39 (Tourism: Other)

RESUMO

A atratividade do enoturismo passa por apresentar um conjunto de atividades que se centram à volta do produto core, mas que extravasam a simples prova de vinho e que permitem envolver os visitantes uma experiência holística. O enoturismo enquanto produto turístico emergente tem possibilitado o desenvolvimento de regiões maioritariamente rurais, com menos recursos turísticos, permitindo a alavancagem da sua marca. O reconhecimento do potencial do enoturismo tem despertado o interesse de regiões e países consagrados no mundo do vinho e de outros que, apesar de produzirem vinho há séculos estavam “adormecidos” em termos turísticos. O presente estudo foi realizado na principal região vinícola, Kakheti, na Geórgia—um dos países vitivinícolas mais pioneiros do mundo, onde se acredita que a produção de vinho tenha se originado. Kakheti alia ao seu património cultural uma rica e diversificada gastronomia, oferecendo também atividades recreativas e educacionais durante a visita. O estudo tem como objetivos a análise da influência de sete dimensões da experiência enoturística no envolvimento dos turistas com a região vitivinícola e, paralelamente perceber o impacto que o envolvimento com a região tem na imagem do destino Geórgia. O estudo apresenta um modelo conceptual original, onde se testam quatro hipóteses de investigação. Os dados foram recolhidos através de um questionário online concebido a partir da revisão sistemática da literatura sobre o fenómeno do enoturismo. Os resultados demonstram que um conjunto de fatores experienciais influencia o envolvimento com a região. Simultaneamente, o envolvimento contribui positivamente para a perceção da imagem de marca do destino.

Palavras-chave: enoturismo, envolvimento, imagem de marca, Kakheti, Geórgia

Sistema de Classificação JEL: Z32 (Tourism and Development); Z39 (Tourism: Other)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Relevance

The trend of visiting wine regions and wineries is not new. Visits to wine production sites have been organized since the time of the Grand Tour, and given the importance of wine in classical cultures, probably even since ancient Greece and Rome (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). Despite a longstanding link between wine and tourism, dedicated academic research in this area only began to gain prominence towards the end of the 1990s. This shift was notably influenced by the first Australian Wine Tourism Conference in 1998, which acted as a catalyst for scholarly work in this field (Correia & Brito, 2016). From the first definitions of wine tourism to the present, this research field has been enriched by numerous studies that approach the phenomenon from different perspectives. For instance, in one of the pioneering studies, Hall (1996) defines wine tourism as "visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors" (Hall, 1996, p. 109).

A new wave of studies at the beginning of the new millennium started to address the phenomenon, considering the concept of rural space as well as the tradition and culture of each region. In this sense, Bruwer (2003) states that wine tourism is regarded as travel aimed at experiencing wineries and wine regions, connected to a broader lifestyle. Furthermore, Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) consider the wine tourism experience to be comprehensive, encompassing not only lifestyle and educational aspects but also connections to art, the interplay of wine and food tasting, and sales directly from the cellar, winery tours, and integration with the image of the tourism destination.

One of the methods most used by researchers to contextualize studies on the phenomenon is to divide them into supply and demand. Regarding supply studies, Getz (2000) characterizes wine tourism through two perspectives: i) for wine producers, it serves as a platform to set themselves apart, to inform and enlighten consumers, and to facilitate direct sales and ii) for regions and countries, Wine tourism represents an opportunity to develop a destination that capitalizes on the distinctive qualities and traditions associated with wine production. Additionally, it offers wineries a marketing platform to educate about their products and facilitate direct sales to the end consumers (Getz & Brown, 2006). Regarding studies focused on demand, from the consumer's perspective, wine tourism offers exposure to a broad selection of products and the prospect of engaging in enriching new experiences (Getz; 2000). In this regard, it is crucial to identify the profile of the visitors and understand their perceptions of the

attributes and attractions presented in each wine-related setting (Cohen and Ben-Nun, 2009; Brochado et al., 2021).

The enjoyment of wine tourism involves not only wine tasting but also its symbolic and psychological aspects, related to the wine region, which are crucial in influencing consumer choices (Costa et al., 2021; Kutateladze et al., 2020). The connection between viticulture and the tourism sector is clear. The hedonic qualities of wine make it a natural partner for tourism (Bruwer, 2003). The integration of the wine industry with tourism has enriched tourist experiences, combining elements of culture, wine, food, lifestyle, and local geography into a unique experience (Kutateladze et al., 2020). Thus, it is the convergence of all these aspects that frequently attracts visitors who are often in pursuit of several of these experiences during their travels or leisure time (Madeira et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2019). Furthermore, the elasticity of wine tourism allows it to be linked to any form of tourism, particularly with types linked to rural activities, such as ecotourism, agritourism, or cultural tourism (Getz, 1998; Natsvlishvili, et al., 2020). In other words, it appears that individuals who experience wine tourism activities do not necessarily choose wine tourism as their first motivation to travel but end up adding this activity to their agenda (Getz et al., 2014; Wargenau & Che, 2006).

Visitors' involvement with wine and the region is a behavioral factor that is still little studied in wine tourism. Involvement with wine is a motivational state of mind that reflects personality and personal needs for wine-related experiences (Santos et al., 2023). Studies on wine involvement typically present the same conclusions: the level of knowledge about wine influences the degree of visitor's involvement in the region (Lockshin & Spawton, 2001; Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002; Getz & Brown, 2006). However, visitors' motivations will be decisive for their involvement with the region and its wines, products, and services. While wine-tasting activities often motivate visits, other experiential factors also influence visitors' behavior (Gu et al., 2020). These factors include gastronomy, culture, and heritage, winescape, wine involvement, entertainment activities (Whether or not directly related to wine), and the desire to learn (Alant & Bruwer, 2004; Carmichael, 2005; Getz & Brown 2006; Sparks, 2007).

Involvement with wine directly influences wine tourism travel intentions for a certain region (Sparks, 2007; Pratt, 2010). In turn, greater involvement with the wine region has an impact on leveraging the destination brand and, consequently, the country (Brown et al., 2007; Gu et al., 2020). Hence, the success of the wine tourism operation and the consequent boosting of the image of the wine region is largely due to the involvement of visitors with the various dimensions of the experience (Madeira et al., 2019; Joy et al., 2021).

Globally, wine tourism is on the rise, increasingly seen as a key contributor to the economic and social growth of rural regions (Presenza, et al., 2010). The importance and growth of wine tourism have been observed and recorded in several countries, including the so-called “New World” countries such as Australia, Canada, the USA, Chile, New Zealand, and South Africa, as well as in “Old World” countries like France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, and Greece highlighting its global importance (Getz & Brown, 2006; Santos et al., 2022). At the same time, we are witnessing wine tourism offerings from new wine regions and emerging wine-producing countries, reflecting the growing awareness within the wine industry of the potential benefits of this activity (Alonso et al., 2015). Traditional wine-producing countries such as Switzerland, Austria, Cyprus, and Georgia which previously had less visibility, have gained greater prominence with the growth of wine tourism (Dunning et al., 2008; Balogh et al., 2017).

Georgia, often referred to as the birthplace of wine and the oldest wine-making country in the world, is widely acknowledged for initiating the global spread of wine. According to archeological evidence, it represents the world’s earliest wine-producing area, with the earliest signs of viticulture and winemaking in the world discovered here (Glonti, 2010; Chkhartishvili & Maghradze 2012). Scientific evidence indicates that Georgia is a notion where humans have historically cultivated and tamed wild grapevines (National Wine Agency, 2023).

Georgians consider wine to be more than just a beverage that complements cuisine. It is integral to daily life in Georgia and deeply rooted in its landscape, economy, and culture. The wines for toasts during the Georgian feast (Supra) are an intrinsic aspect of Georgian tradition (Ghvanidze et al., 2022). The history of wine culture in Georgia has significantly influenced its cultural identity and continues to be a pivotal aspect of its narrative (Kadagishvili and Maisuradze, 2018). As Alice Feiring aptly noted “Wine is the Georgians’ poetry & their folklore, their religion & their daily bread” (National Wine Agency, 2023, p. 21).

Georgian wines represent culture, diversity, and tradition, and are inextricably linked to the landscapes and settings from which they originate. This global curiosity encourages wine tourism as a part of agritourism, especially in Georgia, where the ancient Qvevri winemaking method is recognized by UNESCO as an intangible heritage (Kutateladze et al., 2021). With an 8,000-year viticulture history, over 500 endemic grape varieties, ancient Qvevri wine-making technology, traditional Georgian cuisine, and stunning natural landscapes, Georgia's distinctive wine is derived from a wide range of indigenous grape varieties, which are bolstered by the nation's advantageous geographic location, climate, and soil (Sekhniahsvili, 2020). Georgian winegrowers have improved the selection of grape varieties for ages, producing premium varieties all over Georgia, including Rkatsiteli, Green, Saperavi, Kakhuri Mtsvane, Mtsvivana,

Tsitska, Tsolikauri, Krakhuna, Alexandrouli, Khikhvi, Kisi, Chkhaveri, Ojaleshi and many others (Glonti, 2010). Since July 2012, Georgia has had the unique privilege of advertising Georgian wine under the European Union's motto "Georgia is the cradle of wine" (Kadagishvili and Maisuradze, 2018).

Georgia is well-positioned for the rapid development of wine tourism (Sekhniashvili, 2020). The growth of wine tourism can act as a driving force for economic and social development in many of Georgia's rural areas, presenting a significant opportunity for the country to enhance this sector (Anderson, 2013). For this reason, Georgia's government prioritizes its strategic position as a premier wine destination, vigorously promoting its wine regions as top tourist attractions. There is a strong link between increased wine production, the number of certified wineries, and rising visitor numbers in the country (Samadashvili, 2018).

Tourist arrivals increased from 1.5 million in 2009 to 7.2 million in 2018, coinciding with a rise in vineyard area from 41,200 hectares in 2007 to 55,000 in 2018. Moreover, family-run wineries that offer accommodation and wine tourism experiences have become a vital economic resource for rural regions. This suggests that a country's wine production capability is strongly related to its tourism influx and revenue (Ghvanidze et al., 2022).

Therefore, it is vitally important to understand which factors contribute most to greater tourist involvement with Kakheti wine region and what is the impact of this involvement on the country's brand image. Furthermore, it is equally important to understand whether national tourists have a different involvement than foreigners, to the region and which dimensions of the experience contribute most to this involvement.

1.2. Research Aim

The purpose of the present study is to understand what dimensions have the greatest impact on the Wine Involvement of Kakheti, Georgia's leading viticulture region. Despite Georgia's rich history and cultural significance in wine, wine tourism in Kakheti has emerged recently compared to other traditional wine tourism destinations. During the literature review process, it was found that there is a lack of deep understanding of the experience dimensions that most contribute to the involvement of external or internal tourists with the wine region. On the other hand, it is equally important to understand whether involvement with the wine region contributes to boosting Georgia's brand image. The identification of this knowledge gap was the motto that gave rise to the conception of this dissertation. Therefore, the study aims to analyze the impact of the seven experiential dimensions of wine tourism in Kakheti region, identified in the literature review as those that most influence the tourist's involvement with the

place: wine, gastronomy, culture, and heritage, winescape, staff interaction, education, and entertainment. Furthermore, another objective of this work is to analyze the impact of visitor involvement on Georgia's brand image.

To be able to address the objectives of the research, it is important to understand the most important experiential dimensions that contribute decisively to the involvement of tourists with the wine region and its attributes and, at the same time, how this involvement positively affects the region's brand image. To properly conduct this research, a quantitative research method was applied, with data collected through a questionnaire. A total of 204 responses were obtained, divided between international and Georgian tourists. Relevant data was gathered through online questionnaires and analyzed using the software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 28) and AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures), leading to conclusions pertinent to the research topic.

Consequently, the study seeks to address the following research questions: First, understand which experiential factors most influence Kakheti Wine Region Involvement. Next, to determine what are the experience-related factors that most influence Georgia's Brand Image. The third question sought to understand the impact of the Wine Region's Involvement on Georgia's Brand Image. Finally, we intended to evaluate the impact of factors related to the wine tourism experience and the image of the Georgian brand, with the wine region involvement as a mediating variable.

1.3. Dissertation Structure

The present master's Thesis is structured as a dissertation and is divided into six major chapters, as shown in Figure 1.1. The first chapter introduces the topic of the study, provides contextualization, defines the research problem, research questions, and objectives, as well as explains the relevance of the study. The second chapter lays the theoretical foundation of the study by reviewing key literature. The third chapter illustrates and explains the conceptual model of the research, detailing its variables, dimensions, and the rationale for their selection. Moreover, it proposes possible answers and hypotheses related to research questions. The fourth chapter describes the methodology, explains the design and projection of the research, describes the methods used for data collection and analysis, and outlines how data is processed. The following results chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the collected data, leading to specific approaches and fulfilling the research aim. The final chapter summarizes the main theoretical findings and managerial implications, highlights the study's limitations, and provides options for further research (see Figure 1.1).

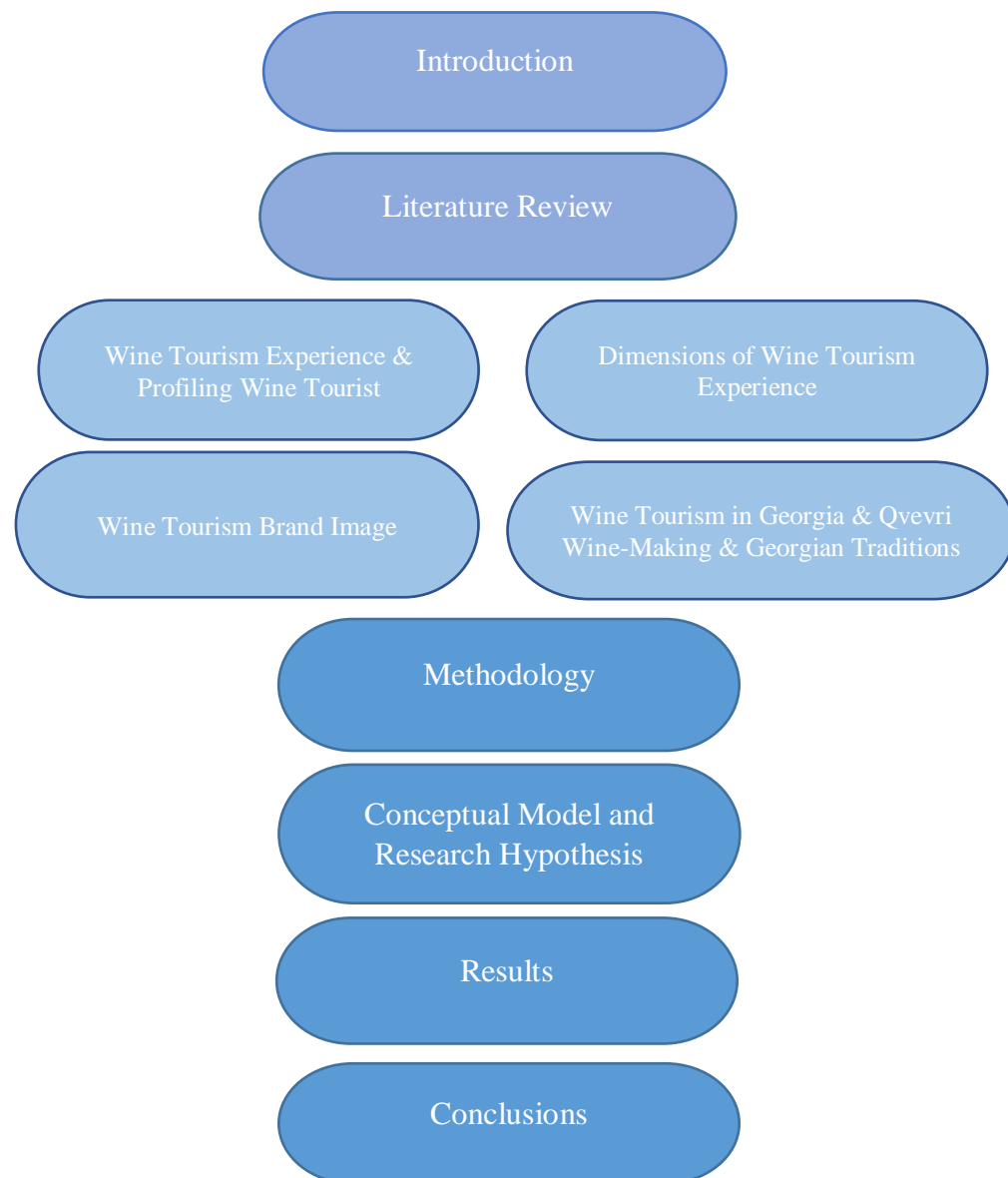


Figure 1.1-Dissertation Structure

Source: Author's elaboration, 2024

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Wine Tourism Experience

Wine tourism is a unique form of tourism, composed of different activities, which leads to a holistic sensory journey, incorporating elements such as taste, cultural immersion, sensory delight, and active participation in wine-related activities (Madeira et al., 2019; Santos, et.al 2019). Therefore, visiting a wine region is not only proof of the growing fascination with wine and the wine regions that produce it but also an immersion in the wine landscape where the wineries are located, as well as in the culture and local heritage (Mitchell & Hall, 2004). Furthermore, wine tourists seek a multifaceted experience that integrates the natural environment, wine, cuisine, culture, and history, encompassing unique encounters deeply rooted in the region's heritage (Charter, 2006; Santos, et al., 2019). In that sense, the scenic beauty of vineyards, coupled with the typically pleasant climate of wine-producing areas, makes these destinations appealing for most of the year (Haller et al., 2021).

The wine tourism experience revolves around consumers who are primarily driven by their passion for wine, seeking opportunities to explore destinations associated with wine tasting and purchasing (Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009). Hence, the primary motivation for choosing a wine destination is solely to indulge in wine sampling and purchasing. Secondary motivations, such as socializing, acquiring knowledge about wine and winemaking, enjoying entertainment, experiencing rural landscapes, admiring scenery, or simply enjoying a day out, further enrich the overall wine tourism experience (Massa & Bédé, 2017). Moreover, wine tourists seek to experience a complex interplay of the natural environment, wine, food, culture, and history, encompassing unique encounters deeply rooted in the region's heritage (Charters, 2006; Santos, et al., 2019). These experiences can be offered through a diverse range of activities including festivals, events, visits to cultural heritage sites, culinary indulgences, accommodation services, educational initiatives, tasting opportunities, winery direct sales, and vineyard tours (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002).

Hence, the wine tourism experience is a holistic concept that encapsulates cognitive, emotional, sensory, and behavioral reactions to stimuli encountered at the winery, from initial arrival to final departure (Massa & Bédé, 2017). This multifaceted experience serves as a marketing avenue, enriching the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the region, that attracts and engages potential and actual wine tourists (Correia & Brito, 2016).

2.2. Profiling the Wine Tourist

Wine tourists are the centerpiece of this type of tourism process, as their presence is vital for the existence and growth of wine tourism (Madeira et al., 2019). Since the first studies on the phenomenon of wine tourism, the characterization of the wine tourist has been the subject of discussion. Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) asked the crucial question: who is the wine tourist? Although the answer is complex, there are two points that all wine tourists seem to agree on. Despite the diversity of existing wine tourists, all of them, to a greater or lesser extent, have a passion for, or at least an interest in, wine, which is the occasional reason for visiting a particular wine region (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). Furthermore, wine tourists seek unique and memorable sensory experiences related to wine and the winescape (Bruwer & Alant, 2009). In this sense, wine tourists can be classified as sensation seekers, who pursue unique emotions, irrespective of their geographic origin, age, or level of wine expertise (Galloway et al., 2008). If it seems consensual that there is more than one type of wine tourist, it is also evident that researchers agree on the importance of identifying the various visitor profiles (Brown & Getz, 2005). The wine tourist characterization and segmentation are essential so that the agents involved in the wine tourism business can adapt and present products and services that satisfy them (Bruwer et al., 2002).

The most used ways to segment wine tourists are psychographic and demographic criteria such as age, gender, education level, income, lifestyle, motivations, or behavior (Carlsen, 2004; Getz & Brown, 2006; Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2011). For example, Dodd and Bigotte (1997) utilized demographic data to assess consumer perceptions based solely on age and income, presented in two categories: older individuals with high incomes and younger individuals with lower incomes. Johnson (1998), categorized two segments of wine tourists, based on the motivation for visiting wine tourists: the “specialized tourist” and the “generalist”. Dodd (1999), segments wine tourists into two categories relative to their understanding of wine: “advanced or specialized” and “basic or intermediate”. Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) classified tourists into four segments: regarding their level of engagement with wine: “wine lovers”, “interested in wine”, “wine novices” and “hangers-on”. Galloway and colleagues (2008) focus on segmentation concerning the search for sensations, classifying them as lower sensation seekers, and higher sensation seekers.

2.3. Wine as the Core Product

Wine is more than just a beverage, recognized for its role in promoting relaxation, fostering social interactions, enhancing the dining experience, offering educational insights, and

epitomizing hospitality (Correia & Britto, 2016; Cohen & Ben-Nun, 2009). Furthermore, wine is a unique, typically rural product, coated with strong symbolism, with a connection to traditions and the history and cultural identity of the region where it is produced (Wu & Liang, 2020). Indeed, wine draws individuals who are not just enthusiasts or aficionados of upscale wine brands, but also those who value the area's unique traditions, cultural heritage, and artistic offerings, reflecting a commitment to preserving and celebrating local distinctness (Winter, 2003). In this sense, wine as a product brings together many strengths that allow it to be used in tourism terms. Hence, within the context of wine tourism, wine serves as a catalyst to attract visitors, whose sole purpose is to explore the origin of the product, gaining insights into the locales and methods of production. (Bruwer, 2003).

Wine tourism is a distinctive form of tourism characterized by its focus on wine and the regions that produce it. From a tourism perspective, wine can serve as the primary lure of a region or as one component of a broader array of offerings that, along with other attractions and typical products, helps shape the region's unique appeal (Asero & Patti, 2009). This aspect transcends simple wine tasting, encouraging tourists to delve deep into the wine culture, discover its diverse aspects, and build profound connections with the area's cultural and culinary heritage (Frochot, 2009; Sigala, 2019). Therefore, the essence of wine tourism is intrinsically tied to the overall experience, presenting a voyage that engages the senses, showcases regional dishes, and unveils the beauty of vineyards and scenic landscapes (Madeira et al., 2019). At its core, these immersive, sensory encounters form the foundation of wine tourism, crucially contributing to the distinctiveness and allure of each destination (Santos, et al., 2022).

2.4. The Winescape as the Scenario

Brown and Getz (2005) articulate that wine tourism transcends mere wine consumption, embracing a holistic leisure and vacation activity encapsulated in the concept of a winescape. The winescape reflects the attributes and landscape characteristics of a particular wine context or wine region (Bruwer & Lesschaeve., 2012). Such an environment extends beyond the wine cellar, offering a “total experience” where the confluence of atmosphere, regional culture, and wine creates memorable encounters (Bruwer & Alant, 2009). Emotional alignment with winescape attributes significantly shapes visitors' perception of the overall experience and can greatly influence the decision to visit the region (Santos et al., 2023).

The winescape simultaneously enhances the aesthetic dimension of wine tourism, but also escapism. Aesthetics in wine tourism involves the interpretation of the physical environment that involves the “tourist's gaze”, on the uniqueness of natural and cultural landscapes,

distinguishing them from urban life (Zhang, et al., 2023). Escapism is characterized by a deep immersion of tourists in the reality of the winescape, which translates into a feeling of escape from the daily routine (Kastenholz et al., 2022). It is the contrast of the rural environment that attracts predominantly urban visitors, promoting the immersive rural experience that wine tourism provides (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013).

Hence, the winescape experience encompasses an interaction with physical characteristics such as the natural landscape, the vineyards or the architecture of the wineries, museums, and local buildings (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Thomas et al., 2018). The features of the wine landscape also encompass the culture and heritage of the area, as well as interaction with the staff and inhabitants (Thomas et al., 2018). Thus, the winescape reflects the identity of the wine region, functioning as a trigger for its brand image. Therefore, wine tourism players must consider the winescape as a stage for crafting unforgettable experiences, which perpetuate the image of the destination (Madeira et al., 2019).

2.5. The Staff Role in Wine Tourism

In the realm of wine tourism, crucial components such as service quality, hospitality, and the quality of staff engagement play a pivotal role in both educating visitors about the wine and creating an inviting ambiance (Charters et al., 2009). Wine tourists visit regions with high expectations regarding the service, particularly to hospitality, knowledge, and the staff's ability to provide personalized attention (Madeira et al., 2019). Hence, the winery's staff plays a fundamental role in the ability to connect the visitor to the place, which goes beyond good service (Alant & Bruwer, 2004). The staff's ability as hosts to create a personal connection with their guests is fundamental in the analysis of the creation of memorable experiences (Madeira et al., 2019). Furthermore, this connection proves to be essential for increasing the wine region's brand image and its consequences (Carmichael, 2005). O'Neill and Charters (2006) identified four intangible dimensions that visitors consider when determining the quality of service: i) empathy (staff's capacity to make guests feel welcome), ii) reliability (delivering a consistent standard of service throughout the visit), iii) response (staff's ability to meet the specific guest needs) and iv) insurance (the capacity to provide a sense of security for visitors). The provision of superior service therefore constitutes a fundamental component of wine tourism, potentially serving as a key precursor to the wine tourism industry (Marlowe et al., 2016).

In addition to relational skills, wine tourism staff must have (especially those in the tasting room) excellent know-how of the wine offering of the specific region or country (techniques, grapes, *terroir*) and technical knowledge to conduct wine tastings. (Thach & Olsen, 2006). At

the same time, they must demonstrate the ability to convey stories and immerse visitors in the wine narrative, strengthening their bond both with the wine as a product and with its region, thus elevating the tasting experience (Charters et al., 2009).

Overall, the staff's role in wine tourism is multifaceted and central to providing a comprehensive and enjoyable service, helping to create memorable experiences that lead to increased levels of satisfaction (Madeira et al., 2019). Therefore, for the success of a wine tourism enterprise, staff must be trained to interact with customers both efficiently and effectively (Thach & Olson, 2003).

2.6. Entertainment in Wine Tourism Experiences

Wine is the *raison d'être* (main purpose) of wine tourism, and thus, it ends up being the central entertainment of the visit (Al-Knight & Charters, 2002). However, the wine tourism experience is made up of a range of activities, which may vary according to the region and between producers in the same region (Carlsen & Boksberger, 2015). This wine tourism activity may or may not have a direct relationship with wine (Madeira et al., 2019). In recent years there has been the inclusion of entertainment activities that seek to explore the rural context of the winescape, with non-traditional activities in wine tourism, which reflects the need to use creativity to attract tourists (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). On the other hand, visitor participation in entertainment activities can occur passively (tourists are spectators) or actively (tourists participate in activities), with different levels of absorption, according to the degree of personal involvement in the wine (Madeira et al., 2019; Santos et al., 2023). For example, wine connoisseurs versus novices or families versus couples or individual tourists (Charters & Al-Knight, 2002).

Planning entertainment activities within the realm of wine tourism must, therefore, consider an offer that attracts and occupies the attention of visitors with different levels of interaction with wine (Al-Knight & Charters, 2002). The activities take place in the winery, or vineyard, but also outside the property, as is the case of wine or gastronomic festivals, integrated into the community's lifestyle, crossing wine culture with the cultural and heritage aspects of the region (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013). The set of entertainment activities can be cultural (including visits to museums, musical concerts, and exhibitions), educational (wine tasting, cooking classes, participation in harvests, vineyard tours), or simply leisure (hiking, cycling, balloon trips, or photography), constituting of entertainment for those who visit wine producing regions (Carmichael, 2005).

2.7. Education in Wine Tourism Experiences

Pine & Gilmore (1998) define the concept of an educational experience as rooted in an individual's desire to learn new information. According to Zhang et al. (2023), integrating learning experiences with wine tourism motivates consumers by enriching their knowledge and skills through engaging activities and events encountered during their journey. Wine tourism covers a spectrum of motivations for visitors, including opportunities for personal development through various learning experiences around the wine culture (Santos et al., 2019). Education has always been positioned as one of the most important motivational factors for those who visit a wine region (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2000). Learning as a motivation for wine tourists is evident, regardless of the origin, age, gender, or incoming visitors (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2013; Madeira et al., 2019). Consequently, there is a prevailing belief that incorporating educational elements into the experience constitutes one of the main motivational factors driving wine tourism (Charters et al., 2009).

Hence, education emerges as a crucial aspect of the winery experience, offering tourists a pathway to garner wine-related knowledge, which serves as a primary allure for those in pursuit of emotional fulfillment through travel (Galloway et al., 2008). Among the various learning activities in wine-related tourism, wine tasting stands out as the most prevalent, followed by wine-food pairing (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore 2013; Carvalho et al., 2021). For instance, wineries facilitate direct interactions between visitors, winemakers, and producers fostering an immersive educational environment (Garibaldi & Sfodera, 2020). Moreover, some wineries orchestrate specialized courses and seminars on cooking and winemaking to enrich visitors' understanding and engagement. Additionally, visitors can partake in professional training sessions, delving into the intricacies of wine-making processes such as grape pressing within the workshop setting (Zhang et al., 2023). In conclusion, the educational dimension enriches wine tourism, deepening tourists' engagement and connection to wine culture.

2.8. Gastronomy and Wine Tourism

Although the need for food is a universal aspect of all types of tourism, regarding wine tourism, gastronomy and wine are the central products of this activity (Sparks, 2007; Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Madeira et al., 2019). Gastronomy is thus increasingly recognized as a key component of wine tourism, through its tangible elements, such as indigenous ingredients and local dishes, and intangible factors that revolve around the cultural and heritage value of the gastronomy of each place (Getz & Brown, 2006; Madeira et al., 2019). One of the aspects of wine tourism focuses on exploring the pairing of local wines and regional delicacies (Hall & Mitchell, 2001;

Richards, 2002). This reinforces the intrinsic link between wine tourism with local cuisine, offering an authentic experience that reflects the essence of the destination (Santos et al., 2019). These experiences, ranging from ordinary to extraordinary, can forge emotional connections with the destination, influencing future travel intentions (Madeira, 2019). This hedonistic perspective of wine tourism strongly incorporates all the senses: taste, smell, touch, vision, and hearing, which are particularly important when tasting wine and food (Getz, 2000).

The amalgamation of culinary arts and wine provides visitors with a deeply engaging and genuine encounter (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Such collaboration plays an important role in the growth and promotion of wine tourism locales, enriching the overall tourist experience (Getz & Brown, 2006). The integration of wine with local cuisine showcases the unique cultural and culinary heritage of a region, amplifying the appeal and memorability of wine tourism experiences (Hall & Mitchell, 2000). Thus, local gastronomy and wines are powerful tools for elevating or reinforcing a region's status as a wine tourism destination (Alonso & Liu, 2010). Therefore, the integration of gastronomy into wine tourism plays an essential role in enhancing the branding of destinations and acknowledging cultural authenticity, thereby making a substantial impact on regional economic development (Hegarty & O'Mahoney, 2001).

2.9. Wine Tourism and Local Culture

The profound interrelation between wine and culture, evidenced by wine's historical role in shaping cultural norms, traditions, and social dynamics, underscores its importance across diverse societies (Sigala, 2018). Wine is not only integral to festivities, rites, and ceremonies but also central to the culture and heritage of communities (Mitchell, et al., 2012). Each wine region is a unique artistic expression of its terroir, blending the physical and cultural environment. Factors such as grape variety, soil type, agricultural practices, production techniques, and winemaking processes play pivotal roles in the region's culture (Santos et al., 2019). It reflects a culture rooted in natural conditions, knowledge, and traditions transmitted through generations, thereby forming an integral part of cultural identity and history (Carrasco et al., 2018).

Beyond wine tasting, the wine tourist seeks historical and cultural values in iconic locations, appreciating authentic and memorable experiences. They are interested in exploring wine, harvests, vineyards, cellars, and the offerings of the surrounding landscape (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Santos et al., 2019). Wine tourism enhances this relationship by offering visitors immersive experiences into the cultural dimensions of wine, and the relationship with the history, tradition, and culture of the place (Mitchell et al., 2012). Furthermore, wine tourism

plays a unifying role between tourists and local traditions, topography, recreational activities, culinary delights, and viticulture (Robinson & Getz, 2014). By providing rich experiences, wine tourism allows a deeper engagement with the cultural legacy of the wine-growing area, thus facilitating a comprehensive understanding of its traditions and practices (Sigala, 2018). Wine tourism also contributes to the cultural sustainability of rural regions. By disseminating it to visitors, it conserves, maintains, and preserves the tangible and intangible cultural diversity of wine regions (Robinson, 2021). Therefore, this form of tourism is vital in preserving and promoting the cultural identity of regions, contributing to sustainable development and economic growth by maintaining the unique cultural identity of each area (Carrasco et al., 2018).

2.10. Wine Tourism Involvement

Sherif and Sherif (1967) trace the concept of involvement back to social psychology, specifically identifying "ego-involvement" as the foundational notion. Involvement is characterized as an imperceptible state reflecting motivation, excitement, or interest directed toward a leisure activity or related product. Triggered by specific stimuli or circumstances, it possesses qualities that motivate or drive behavior (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997). Within the realm of wine tourism, involvement is a pivotal element in defining the overall experience. This is because the wine tourist seeks to "connect" with the origin of the product by visiting the places where wine is produced (Bruwer & Rueger-Muck, 2019; Santos et al., 2023).

Wine region involvement affects tourists' perceptions and engagements with both the enablers and barriers of wine tourism, potentially altering the impact of these elements on the entire wine tourism journey (Gómez-Carmona et al., 2023). Wine involvement has been examined through the lens of wine tourists' behavior, highlighting how their depth of knowledge influences their level of engagement during their visit (Santos et al., 2023). The segmentation of wine tourists allows us to determine three levels of involvement with wine culture: low, medium, and high (Nella & Christou, 2014). For example, there seems to be a behavioral relationship between visitors' level of understanding and involvement with wine and the region that produces it (Famularo et al., 2010). On the other hand, the cultural association with wine also defines the level of involvement with different dimensions of the visit, namely the fact that tourists come from countries that do not usually consume wine (Gu et al., 2018). Furthermore, the age of the participants must also be considered when analyzing the level of involvement with wine and the region (Getz & Carlsen, 2008).

The visitor's willingness to interact with the various dimensions of wine tourism experiences has a profound effect of positioning the wine region in the minds of consumers and the consequent desire to visit or revisit the region (Famularo et al., 2010). Thus, it appears that greater involvement with the region and its products demonstrates a positive relationship with the image of the destination (Madeira et al., 2019; Wu & Liang, 2020).

2.11. Wine Tourism Brand Image

A wine region is defined by its comprehensive offerings, which include wine-related activities that enhance the rural image, deepen knowledge of architectural heritage, preserve cultural and gastronomic traditions, and comply with consumer expectations (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). From this perspective, wine designations of origin not only certify the quality of wines and their regions but also protect and leverage the destination brand (Alant & Bruwer, 2010). Therefore, the long-term objective of wine tourism is not only to promote the region but also to enhance the image and reputation of both the regional wines and the region itself (Frochot, 2003).

Considering the specificities that constitute wine tourism, the components of a region's brand image encompass unique cognitive and affective aspects, enabling a wine destination to differentiate itself from its competitors (Wu & Liang, 2020). In that sense, the wine region's image is shaped by a variety of tangible and intangible factors, that allow visitors to escape from their daily routine (Madeira et al., 2019). Consequently, positive experiences contribute to the recognition and positioning of the image of a wine region (Johnson & Bruwer, 2007).

Recent branding studies suggest that consumers' memories of winery visits can impact their perceptions of the brand image (Wu & Liang, 2020; Joy et al., 2021). Thus, it can be stated that the positive associations that consumers establish with the wine region shape positive brand experiences and encourage favorable connections to the brand image, namely brand personality (Drennan et al., 2015 ; Joy et al., 2021), brand awareness (Bruwer et al., 2013; Gomez et al., 2015), brand loyalty (Fountain et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2020), brand equity (Gomez & Molina, 2015, Passagem et al., 2020) and love brand (Drennan et al., 2015; Dias et al., 2023). As a result, wine brands can strengthen the reputation and image of wine areas and their wines by emphasizing regional characteristics that contribute to a unique brand identity (Cambourne et al., 2000; Madeira et al., 2019).

2.12. Wine Tourism in Georgia and Traditional Qvevri Wine-Making

Around the world, wine is regarded as an essential beverage that tells the story of a country and represents its identity. As a result, wine tourism has developed into a unique segment within

the tourism industry, gaining a prestigious status. Georgia is no exception to this trend (Mzareula & Tamarashvili, 2022). Georgia is developing as a key destination for wine tourism, celebrated for its rich history, unique culture, culinary arts, and stunning natural landscapes (Sekhniashvili & Bujdosó, 2020). Wine is significant to Georgian culture and traditions, making visits to local wine regions and wineries a common feature in travel itineraries to delve into Georgian culture (Ghvanidze et al., 2022).

Georgia identifies five primary wine tourism regions: Shida Kartli, Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi, Adjara, and Kakheti (Meladze, 2015). Shida Kartli is famed for its classic European style and premium sparkling wines. Imereti stands out due to its climatic and soil diversity, resulting in a variety of unique wines. Racha-Lechkhumi is noted for its limited vineyards and rare grape varieties. Adjara's vineyards are positioned at elevations of 2–4 meters above sea level (Kutateladze et al., 2021). Kakheti, the principal and oldest wine region is located in Eastern Georgia, bordering the Russian Federation to the north and Azerbaijan to the east and south. Covering 11, 310 square kilometers, Kakheti accounts for around 17,5% of Georgia's area and has a population of approximately 407,000 people (Tchekhashvili, 2017). It hosts the majority of the country's vineyards and wineries, producing over 67% of the country's wine, many of which are recognized internationally for their exports which makes the region the biggest tourism hub too (Ghvanidze et al., 2022).

Although Kakheti produces over 80 grape varieties, the most notable are Rkatsiteli (white) and Saperavi (red). Saperavi is used for both traditional Qvevri and European-style wines and is also excellent for producing pink and sparkling wines (National Wine Agency, 2023). Other common grape varieties include Kakhuri Mtsvane (Kakhetian Green), Qisi, Khikhvi, Budeshuri, Jghia, Mtsvivana, Sapena, Kunsu, Cabernet-Sauvignon, Tavkveri, Ikalto Red, etc. Additionally, of the 20 indigenous wine varieties registered in Georgia, 15 are native to the region such as Tsinandali, Gurjaani, Vazisubani, Manavi, Kardanakhi, Tibaani, Kakheti, Kotekhi, Napareuli, Mukuzani, Teliani, Kindzmarauli, Akhasheni, Kvareli and Khashmi (Rtvelisi, 2024).

Kakhetian wines are known for more accurately representing the characteristics of their soil than any other Georgian wine. These premium wines are made from local grape types employing both traditional and European winemaking methods (Maghradze et al., 2016). Although most wines are now produced using modern methods, Kakheti maintains a unique winemaking tradition that has no analogy in the world. The Kakhetian winemaking technique makes use of Qvevri, enormous clay vessels that are crucial to the process (Buican et al., 2023). These pots are often buried up to their necks in the ground and used for both fermentation and

storage of wine (Glonti, 2010; Barisashvili, 2011). The wine is normally aged for six months to a year before being tapped or bottled, depending on the winemaker's personal preference. This process creates unfiltered, transparent wine since it incorporates not only the grape juice but also the pulp, seeds, and skins, all of which are fermented (Buican et al., 2023). This traditional Qvevri wine-making technique is used all over Georgia, however, it varies across different regions, adapted historically to suit local grape varieties and ecological conditions (Meladze, 2015).

Archaeological evidence suggests that this technology has been used in Georgia for over 8,000 years (Chkhartishvili & Maghradze, 2012). Therefore, Qvevri is an important part of Georgian winemaking culture, representing a centuries-long heritage passed down through generations (Meladze, 2015). This historical significance was recognized globally when the Georgian Qvevri technique was named a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage in 2013 (Shtaltovna & Feuer, 2019). This classification emphasizes the method's distinctiveness while also affirming wine's central significance in Georgian culture. Furthermore, the legacy of winemaking in Qvevri, combined with other elements of the wine tourism sector, positions Georgia as a potentially significant tourist destination (Kadagishvili & Maisuradze, 2018).

The Georgian government actively supports wine tourism in Kakheti, therefore, the infrastructure for the industry is well-developed. The region has well-equipped wineries such as Twins Wine Cellar, Chateau Mere, and Shukhmani Cellar. The Tsinandali Museum Complex, with its medieval cellar, is another highlight (Abesadze & Dokhturishvili, 2023). Beyond winemaking, the region boasts a variety of tourist attractions, including the Davit Gareji monastery complex, Signaghi—the “city of love”, Lopota Lake, and the Lagodekhi natural reserve, among others (Samadashvili, 2018). Furthermore, the creation of high-end hotels such as the Ambassadors Kachreti Resort, Lopota Lake Complex, and Radisson Tsinandali Estate has boosted wine tourism and enhanced tourists' cultural experiences (MRDI, 2014).

The "Kvareli Wine Cave" in Kakheti is a noteworthy tourist attraction that offers a unique experience with its extensive wine reservoir housed in a 7.7-kilometer tunnel system, consisting of two main and thirteen connecting tunnels (Winery Khareba, 2021). Maintaining a constant temperature of 14-16°C, ideal for wine aging, the facility attracts both domestic and international tourists (Meladze, 2015). One of the cave's entrances is dedicated to tourism, where visitors can explore Georgian winemaking with expert guides, taste over 50 types of reserve wines from "Meghvineoba Khareba," and participate in traditional activities such as bread baking, Churchkhela dipping, and Khinkali and Khachapuri making which are integral to Georgian cuisine (Winery Khareba, 2021).

On the other hand, Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, has a thriving wine tourism sector with various wine bars and restaurants. Many of these restaurants have wine cellars where guests can sample Georgian wine (Keith, 2013). In addition, numerous historic wineries in the city have been restored, as well as new ones built. Tbilisi also has a wine museum that showcases antique Georgian wine containers and an old storehouse with a collection of up to 25,000 wine bottles from various times (Tourism Organization, 2019).

Every autumn, wine regions in Georgia host celebrations where visitors enjoy local wines and freshly prepared dishes. Tourists can partake in the Vintage and witness traditional winemaking techniques (Meladze, 2015). Tourist companies offer comprehensive wine tours that include vineyard visits, learning about the ancient Qvevri winemaking process, and wine tastings. Additionally, the wine regions offer a variety of activities like vineyard weddings, hot air balloon rides over vineyards, grape picking with farmers, and horse riding. Participants in these tours are often captivated by the local wine's history and culture, making it a valuable tourism product (Abesadze & Dokhturishvili, 2023).

Furthermore, the Wine Road initiative began in 2012 and has steadily progressed, with recommendations for the extension of 50 cellars. It grew by 32 units in 2015 and an additional 46 in 2019. Currently, the project includes 211 wine cellars across Georgia, with the bulk (122) located in Kakheti, the country's key wine region (Rytkönen et al., 2021). Other notable initiatives include the creation of a General Strategy for Wine Tourism in 2015, the donation of a traditional Georgian Qvevri to the UN Geneva Office in 2016, and proactive marketing through the #WelcometoGeorgia campaign, which distributes wine to international tourists at airports. Georgia also actively participates in major international wine exhibitions, hosts wine festivals, and enters competitions (Kutateladze et al., 2021).

2.13. Georgian Traditional Feast and the Concept of Tamada/Toastmaker

The deep connection between wine, food, and self-reflection in Georgian culture may be seen not only in spiritual and religious rituals but also in local social events, particularly the traditional Georgian feast known as the Supra (Tuite, 2005). The Georgian Supra tradition is recognized as an intangible cultural heritage monument of Georgia, serving as a significant cultural legacy and a defining characteristic of the nation's identity (Vasadze & Baqanidze 2020). This communal celebration marks various life events and fosters community bonding. Tourists attending Georgian Supra are pleasantly delighted by exquisite Georgian wine, cuisine, traditional folklore, national dances, and, of course, Tamada (Toast maker) and his toasts (Goldstein, 2013).

Tamada Institute is a significant part of the Georgian traditional feast as Tamada/Toastmaker is the host of the Supra leading toasts during the whole event (Rytkönen et al., 2021). During the Georgian feast, the oldest man present is usually designated as the tamada. This role requires years of training beginning in childhood, reflecting a tradition where only men previously attended these gatherings (Linderman, 2011). A toast is considered more of a blessing in Georgian culture, distinguishing it from European toasting rituals which makes this ceremony even more attractive and different for tourists. (Goldstein, 2013). Georgia has already earned a reputation for hospitality, and most foreign tourists who experience Georgian traditional feast and gastronomy claim to its exceptional taste and aroma (Tuite, 2005). Georgian traditional Supra with Tamada event has evolved alongside the country's history, with wine culture remaining a recurring theme in Georgian narratives which are also more and more used for developing wine tourism in the country (Muehlfried, 2008).

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

3.1. Conceptual Model

The last decades have been very productive in wine tourism studies, examining both demand and supply perspectives, as previously mentioned. One of the aspects of wine tourism that has significantly intrigued researchers is the experiential dimension, specifically the factors that lead to creating a memorable holistic experience. For the experience to result in something unforgettable, visitors must be involved with the region and its attributes. In this sense, a second wave of studies has focused on the immersive process that results from wine tourists' engagement with the place. Considering Kakheti's specific characteristics, the conceptual model was developed in this context. The conceptual model presents the variables identified as most relevant to wine region involvement. At the same time, it explores the relationship between involvement and the destination's image. To illustrate the relationship between the variables and test the research hypotheses, the conceptual model presented in Figure 3.1 was outlined.

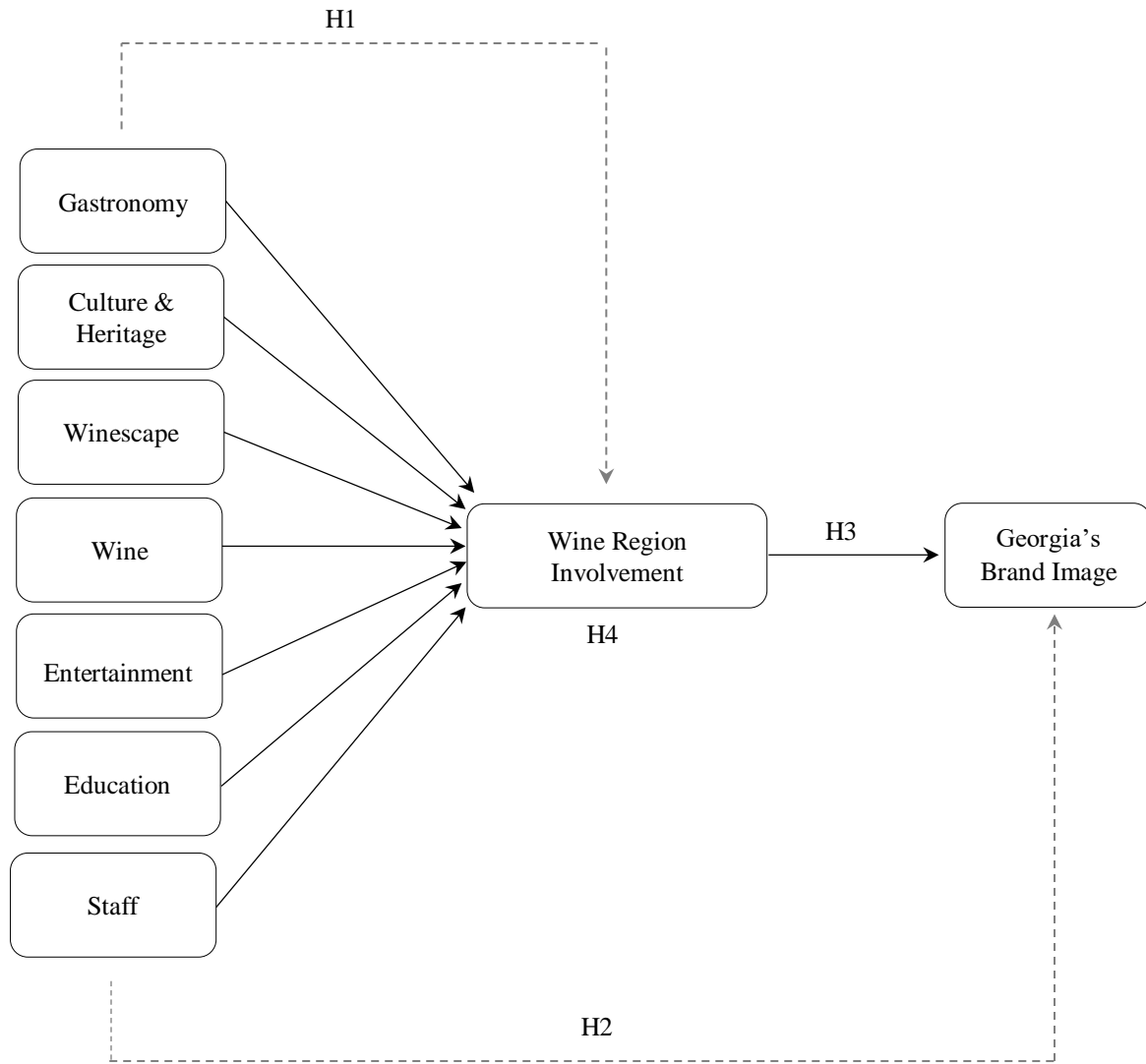


Figure 3.1 -Conceptual Model

Source: Author's elaboration, 2024

3.2. Research Hypotheses

The definition of the conceptual model facilitated the formulation and testing of four hypotheses. These hypotheses were verified through the analysis of data collected via the questionnaire to determine whether they were confirmed or refuted. Based on the information collected through the systematic review of the literature and the design of the model, the present study assumes the following hypotheses:

H1: Wine Region Involvement is explained by the set of experiential factors

H2: A set of experiential factors influences Georgia's Brand Image

H3: Wine Region Involvement positively influences Georgia's Brand Image

H4: The relationship between experience factors and the Georgian Brand Image is mediated by the Wine Region Involvement.

Involvement refers to a psychological state characterized by motivation, enthusiasm, or personal interest in the tourist destination and its recreational activities (Gu et al., 2020). Wine

is an unusual product capable of involving consumers in a spectrum of activities related to wine culture (Ali-Knight & Pitt, 2001). Involvement with wine expresses the interest and enthusiasm that consumers show with wine (Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2011). From this perspective, the visitor's involvement in the overall experience of wine tourism constitutes a central element of the visit, considering that the wine tourist is someone who, for personal satisfaction, needs to connect with the origins and culture of the wine region (Bruwer & Rueger -Muck, 2019). Furthermore, involvement with wine makes consumers become wine tourists, traveling to producing regions to have wine-related experiences (Madeira et al., 2019). Wine involvement acts as the catalyst for visiting a specific producing region, to have a holistic, multidimensional experience, through activities organized around wine, which goes far beyond wine tasting (Brown et al., 2007). The multidimensional experience encompasses various elements, including leisure activities (Getz & Brown, 2006), relaxation (Carmichael, 2005), exploration of the culture and heritage of the terroir (Wu & Liang, 2020), culinary experiences and pairing (Sparks, 2007), socialization and hospitality, (Alant & Bruwer, 2004), service encounters (Tach & Olsen 2006), and educational aspects (Madeira et al., 2019).

Considering that the motivations for visiting a region may vary, it is reasonable to suggest that the degree of involvement in the different dimensions of the experience may differ accordingly (Brown et al., 2007; Ogbeide & Bruwer, 2013). A lower level of visitor knowledge indicates a potential preference for certain activities over others (Pratt, 2010). On the other hand, a higher level of involvement translates into an increased desire to engage in available wine tourism activities (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). Regardless of the degree of involvement with wine, it significantly impacts visitor behavior before, during, and after their stay in the region (Lee et al., 2017).

Thus, as individuals begin to form an emotional connection to a particular wine region, they reinforce a sense of identity with the place (Canovi et al., 2020). Higher wine region involvement positively impacts the perception of the destination brand (Gomez et al., 2015; Scorrano et al., 2018). The positioning of the region, its wines, and its producers in the minds of visitors allows it to differentiate itself from the competition and, eventually, move into the category of “brand love” (Santos et al., 2022).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Approach

The investigation was operationalized through a quantitative methodology anchored in a hypothetic-deductive perspective, aiming to determine whether there is statistical evidence to validate the hypotheses formulated from the literature review regarding Wine Region Involvement and its impact on Georgia's Brand Image. As an experimental study, it sought to demonstrate the causal relationship that exists between the independent variables (IVs), the mediator variable (MV), and the dependent variable (DV; Rad-Camayd & Espinoza-Freire, 2020). Data were collected at a single point in time using a survey questionnaire administered to a convenience sample. This sampling method was chosen for its ease of access to participants and their willingness to complete the questionnaires (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020).

The primary aim of this investigation was to analyze the mediating role of the Wine Region Involvement in the relationship between Wine, Gastronomy, Culture & Heritage, Winescape, Entertainment, Education, and Staff on Georgia's Brand Image. To further explore this topic, four specific objectives were formulated:

1. To identify the factor that most influences the Wine Region Involvement.
2. To determine the experience-related factor that most influences Georgia's Brand Image.
3. To analyze the impact of the Wine Region Involvement on Georgia's Brand Image.
4. To ascertain the extent to which the relationship between experience-related factors and Georgia's Brand Image is mediated by the Wine Region Involvement.

4.2. Questionnaire

For the purposes of this Master's dissertation, a tailored questionnaire instrument was developed based on existing literature, with a visitor-centric approach. The questionnaire items and sociodemographic questions were entered into Google Forms. The link was distributed via email to the investigator's contacts and shared on her social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn). One exclusion criterion, in addition to the minimum age requirement, was having visited at least one producer in the Kakheti region in the last twelve months. Considering that the respondents were of various nationalities, the questionnaire was available in two language versions: Georgian and English.

The questionnaire consists of nine items developed from a review of the literature (Wine, Gastronomy, Culture and Heritage, Staff, Entertainment, Education, Winescape, Involvement, and Image). The questionnaire was organized into two sections. The first part of the survey included an explanatory text detailing the study's objectives, the scope of its execution, and the

estimated time required for completion (approximately ten minutes). Additionally, it assured participants that their responses would be treated with complete confidentiality

The second section requested respondents to rate their level of agreement with a list of 36 specifically selected and conveniently adapted questions to fit the specific context under investigation. The questions aimed to define visitors' involvement with the Kakheti wine region. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Subsequently, the data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 28) and AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures).

4.3. Sample

The study involved 204 tourists, 63.7% of whom are female. Most participants were between 21 and 30 years old (68.6%). Additionally, it was found that 86.2% of respondents have an academic degree equivalent to or higher than a bachelor's degree. It was also noted that more than half of the participants (57.8%) are from Georgia (domestic tourists).

Table 4.1- Characterization of the sample

Sociodemographic variables	N	%
Sex		
Male	74	36.3
Female	130	63.7
Age		
Less than or equal to 20 years	12	5.9
Between 21 and 30 years	140	68.6
Between 31 and 40 years	26	12.7
Greater than or equal to 41 years	26	12.7
Education level		
High school diploma /GEO	21	10.3
Associate degree	7	3.4
Bachelor's degree	91	44.6
Master's degree or higher education	78	38.2
PhD	7	3.4
Nationality		
Internal tourists (Georgia)	118	57.8
External tourists	86	42.2

Repeat visit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	122	59,8	59,8	59,8
	Yes	82	40,2	40,2	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

Intention to revisit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	21	10,3	10,3	10,3
	Yes	183	89,7	89,7	100,0
	Total	204	100,0	100,0	

4.4. Measures and Scales

Gastronomy. It was evaluated using the four items formulated by Ab-Latif et al. (2024). All items were positively phrased (e.g., The taste of food here is unique, not found in other places), indicating that the higher the average sum of all responses, the greater the satisfaction with the local gastronomy.

Education. The educational component was assessed through four items (e.g., I was able to improve my skills in wine tasting) developed by Madeira et al. (2019).

Wine Region Involvement. The degree of involvement with the wine region was assessed by four items (e.g., Drinking local wines was a pleasurable experience) developed by Santos et al. (2023).

Culture & Heritage. To understand tourists' perceptions of the local culture and heritage, questions developed by Andrade-Suárez and Caamaño-Franco (2020) were used (e.g., Tourism contributes to improving and enhancing the value of the local culture and heritage).

Entertainment. The four items developed by Madeira et al. (2019), based on the studies of Byrd et al. (2016), assessed the level of tourist entertainment (e.g., Participating in recreational activities was a perfect complement to the visit).

Winescape. Participants' opinions on the winescape were measured using four items (e.g., The wine region scenery is attractive) outlined by Santos et al. (2023).

Staff. The quality of service provided by the staff was evaluated using four items (e.g., Staff was polite and courteous) developed by Madeira et al. (2019).

Wine. To assess the participants' perceptions of wine, we used the four items developed by Bruwer et al. (2013; e.g., Tasting local wines was a unique experience).

Georgia's Brand Image. Four items (e.g., The wine region brand has a personality that distinguishes itself from others) developed by Madeira et al. (2019) assessed tourists' perceptions of the destination's image.

All items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), depending on the degree of agreement with the statements. The higher the sum of the item values, the more positive the tourists' perception of each analyzed factor. To characterize the study sample, sociodemographic data were also collected (e.g., age, gender, education level).

5. RESULTS

The first step for the data treatment was to export all the data collected in the questionnaire from an Excel file downloaded from Google Forms. The data were then imported into the IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 28) software to compute the tests. Initially, the psychometric properties of the instruments used were analyzed to ensure their validity and reliability. Subsequently, the mean values of participants' perceptions of Georgia's Brand Image (DV) were compared based on their sociodemographic characteristics, namely gender and age. To validate the research hypotheses, regression analyses were also conducted. Finally, the results of the mediation model are presented.

5.1. Construct Validity

To verify whether the model under study fits the sample data, a **Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)** was conducted. The analysis was based on the adjustment indices recommended by Xia and Yang (2018), whose reference values are presented in Table 5.1. Thus, the following measures were used: the Chi-square (χ^2), which allows testing the fit between the model and the observed covariance matrix; the CFI (Comparative Fit Index), which represents the proportion of total covariance among the observed variables that are explained in the model; the GFI (Goodness of Fit Index), which measures the proportion of observed variance and covariance explained by the model; and the RMSEA (Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation), which allows evaluating the quality of model fit.

Table 5.1- Reference Values for Goodness-of-Fit Indices

Goodness-of-fit indices reference values	Reference values
Chi-square (χ^2)	The smaller, the better
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	Greater than 0.90
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	Greater than 0.90
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	Less than 0.08

The obtained data were compared with the values mentioned in Table 5.1, and it was observed that, even after covarying the errors suggested by the modification indices of AMOS, the GFI remains below the reference values [$\chi^2 = 2.23$, $p < 0.01$, CFI = 0.91, GFI = 0.76, RMSEA = 0.07, LO90 = 0.07, HI90 = 0.08; Table 5.2).

Table 5.2- Model Adjustment Measurements

	χ^2	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	LO90	HI90
Model	2.47	0.89	0.72	0.08	0.08	0.09
Covariation of errors suggested by modification indices in AMOS						
	χ^2	CFI	GFI	RMSEA	LO90	HI90
Model	2.23	0.91	0.76	0.07	0.07	0.08

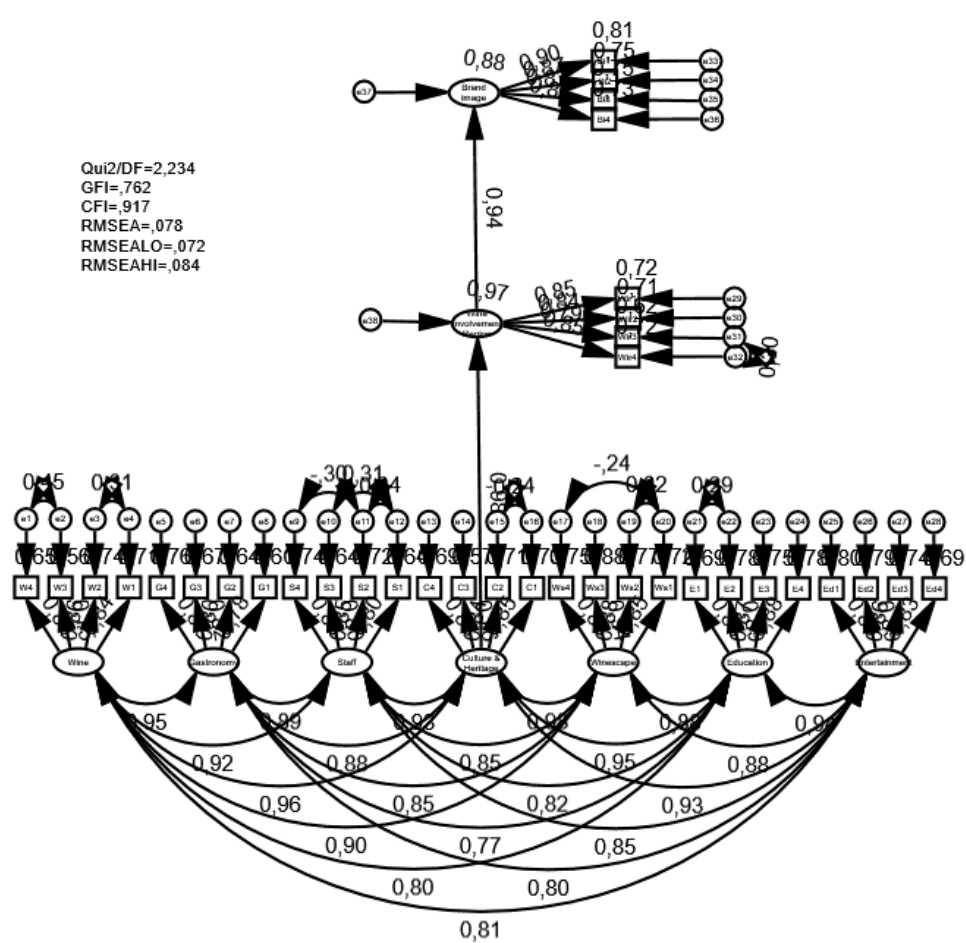


Figure 5.1 - Model Representation- depicts the confirmatory analysis of the investigative model

Source: Author's elaboration, 2024

5.2. Internal Consistency Analysis

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which proved to be quite adequate for all variables under study, as values greater than 0.70 are deemed satisfactory according to Fullmer and Daniel (2020; Table 5.3).

Table 5.3- Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the Intervening Variables in the Research

Variables	Cronbach's alpha coefficients
Wine	0.90
Gastronomy	0.88
Staff	0.90
Culture & Heritage	0.90
Winescape	0.93
Education	0.92
Entertainment	0.92
Wine Region Involvement	0.91
Georgia's Brand Image	0.92

5.3. Descriptive Analysis

Following the evaluation of the psychometric properties of the instruments, descriptive statistics analysis of the variables involved in the research was conducted, revealing that the highest mean value belongs to Gastronomy ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.76$). These findings suggest that local dishes are the tourists' preferred choice (Table 5.4).

Continuously, the perception regarding Georgia's Brand Image, which constitutes the DV of this investigation, was compared based on tourists' gender and age (Table 5.5). Data analysis unveiled that males ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.93$) hold a more positive opinion about Georgia compared to females ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.75$), with these differences being statistically significant [$t_{(202)} = -3.132$, $p < 0.05$].

Table 5.4-Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Min.	Max	M	SD
Wine	1	5	4.16	0.80
Gastronomy	1	5	4.28	0.76
Staff	1	5	4.19	0.81

Culture & Heritage	1	5	4.24	0.82
Winescape	1	5	4.21	0.87
Education	1	5	4.17	0.87
Entertainment	1	5	4.18	0.84
Wine Region Involvement	1	5	4.23	0.78
Georgia's Brand Image	1	5	4.21	0.84

Note. Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum; M =Mean; SD = Standard-Deviation

Table 5.5-Comparison of Mean Values of Georgia's Brand Image by Tourist's Gender

	Male		Female		t-test	Sig
	M	SD	M	SD		
Georgia's Brand Image	4.35	0.93	3.97	0.75	-3.132	0.002*

Note. * $p < 0.05$; M =Mean; SD = Standard-Deviation

In terms of age group, it was possible to verify that there are no statistically significant differences based on this variable regarding the perception of Georgia's Brand Image [$F_{(3, 200)} = 0.813$, $p = 0.488$]. However, it has been observed that the older the tourists are, the more positive this perception tends to be.

5.4. Validation of research hypotheses

To validate the research hypotheses, regression analyses were conducted to illustrate the existing causal relationships between the independent variables (IV) and the mediating variable (MV) which, according to hypothesis, influence the behavior of the dependent variable (DV).

Thus, we aimed to identify the factor that most influences the Wine Region Involvement (Table 5.6). This analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression, employing the Enter method, which revealed that the model is linear and statistically significant [$F_{(7,196)} = 143.809$, $p < 0.001$] and that 83.1% of the perception of the Wine Region Involvement is explained by the set of factors included in the model. It was further determined that Wine Involvement is the factor that most influence tourists' perception of the Wine Region Involvement ($\beta = 0.347$, $t = 6.084$, $p < 0.001$; **Hypothesis 1**).

Table 5.6- Factors Influencing the Wine Region Involvement

Explanatory Variables	Wine Tourism Holistic Experience (β)
Wine	0.285**
Gastronomy	0.154
Staff	0.271
Culture & Heritage	0.077
Winescape	0.154*
Education	0.174*
Entertainment	0.329**
Adjusted R ²	0.831
$F_{(4, 635)}$	113.470**

On the other hand, it was found that the factor related to experience that most influence Georgia's Brand Image of the location is Entertainment ($\beta = 0.351$, $t = 5.492$, $p < 0.001$; **Hypothesis 2**). Nevertheless, it was determined that Entertainment only explains 2.56% of tourists' perception of the Brand Image of the location, indicating that there are additional factors not included in the model that also influence this perception (Table 5.7).

Table 5.7 - Factors Influencing Georgia's Brand Image

Explanatory variables	Georgia's Brand image (β)	R ² Part
Wine	0.057	0.00
Gastronomy	0.012	0.00
Staff	0.021	0.00
Culture & Heritage	0.115	0.00
Winescape	0.215*	0.00
Education	0.314**	1.90
Entertainment	0.351**	2.56
Adjusted R ²	0.829	
$F_{(7, 196)}$	141.123**	

The Third Hypothesis could be confirmed through data analysis, as it was found that the Wine Region Involvement positively influences the local Brand Image, with this influence

being statistically significant ($\beta = 0.824, t = 20.674, p < 0.001$). It is worth mentioning that the model is linear [$F_{(1, 202)} = 427.394, p < 0.001$] and 67.7% of tourists' perceptions of the Brand Image can be explained by the Wine Region Involvement.

Furthermore, it was found that when the Wine Region Involvement enters the model as a mediating variable, the value attributed to Winescape decreases slightly, changing from $\beta = 0.215, p < 0.05$, to $\beta = 0.208, p > 0.05$, remaining significant. On the other hand, Education (changing from $\beta = 0.315, p < 0.001$, to $\beta = 0.306, p > 0.001$) and Entertainment (changing from $\beta = 0.351, p < 0.001$, to $\beta = 0.337, p > 0.001$) tend to decrease, suggesting that the importance attributed to the Wine Region Involvement overrides the importance attributed to the Education and Entertainment factors. There is partial mediation of the Wine Region Involvement, as there is an indirect effect of the Winescape, Education, and Entertainment factors on Brand Image (**Hypothesis 4**; Figure 5.2).

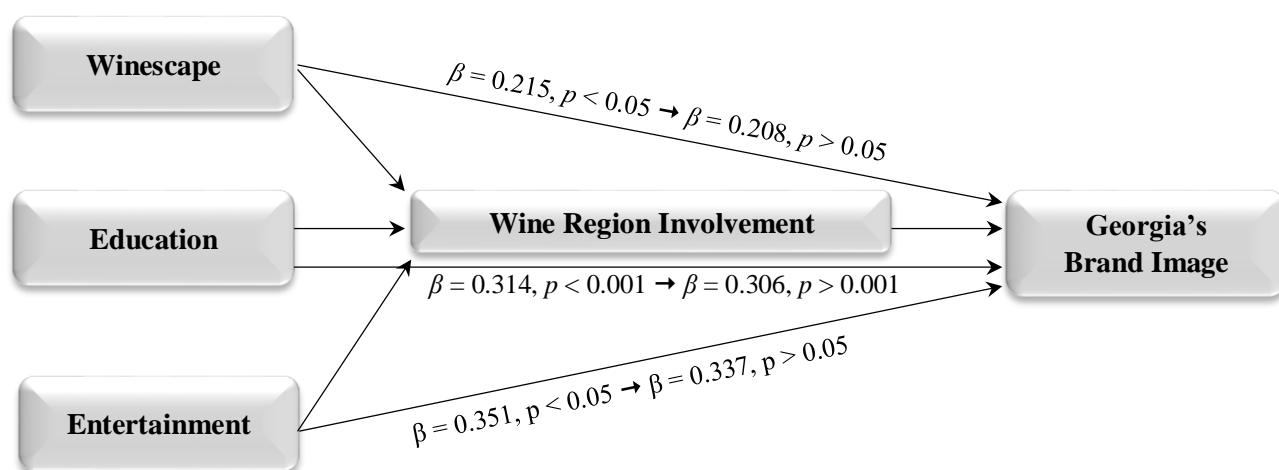


Figure 5. 2-Mediation Model

Source: Author's elaboration, 2024

Additionally, we aimed to ascertain if there is a positive correlation between tourists' perception of the local Brand Image, nationality (domestic tourists versus international tourists), and prior visitation to the location (Table 5.8), as it was found that 40.2% of the participants were already repeating the experience. The results reveal that the strongest correlation occurs between being domestic tourists and tourists repeating the visit ($r = 0.657, p < 0.001$). It was also found that the correlation between the Georgia's Brand Image and nationality is stronger ($r = 0.155, p < 0.05$) than the correlation between the Brand Image of Georgia and the fact that tourists repeat the visit ($r = 0.149, p < 0.05$).

Finally, it was possible to ascertain that 40.7% of tourists visited Georgia due to the Wine Region Involvement, and 42.6% are residents, living in Georgia. Furthermore, it was found that 89.7% of tourists intend to return.

Table 5.8-Correlation Between Georgia's Brand Image, Tourist Typology, and Visit Repetition

	Georgia's Brand Image	Nationality
Georgia's Brand Image	-	
Nationality	0.155*	-
Repeat the visit	0.149*	0.657**

6. CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned throughout the work, the study of the impact of wine tourists' involvement with the region is in its embryonic phase, particularly concerning the moderating role of involvement in the overall experience and its relationship with the destination's image. Few studies relate the degree of wine involvement of consumers with the wine tourism experience (Charters & Pettigrew, 2005; Marzo-Navarro & Pedraja-Iglesias, 2012; Alonso et al., 2015, Gu et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2023), and even fewer explore the relationship between the experience factors, involvement, and wine tourism brand image (Famularo et al., 2010; Pratt & Sparks, 2014; Gu et al., 2018; Wu & Liang, 2020).

This study had four research objectives: firstly, to measure the impact of the chosen experience variables on engagement with Kakheti, the principal wine-making region of Georgia. Secondly, to understand which experience factor most influences Georgia's Brand Image. Thirdly, to determine the impact of Wine Region Involvement on Georgia's Brand Image. Finally, to verify to what extent the relationship between experiential factors and the destination image of Georgia is explained by the involvement of the wine region. Hence, a conceptual model was developed, with the constructs considered to be most relevant, based on the systematic literature and the specific context of the study. The model was then tested and evaluated through an online survey, addressed to those who visited the Kakheti region. The sample collected consists mainly of individuals aged between 18 and 40 years, with respondents divided between Georgian (57.8%) and foreign (42.2%).

Although some studies analyze the impact of wine involvement on the entourage experience, they typically present the involvement factor as a dependent variable. In this work, involvement is explored from a contrary perspective, where the experience factors are tested regarding the mediating role of involvement. Therefore, for the best knowledge, the model presented explores scales that have not yet been tested by previous studies.

Results from the contained analysis showed that the various validity and reliability assessment measures support the model, thus validating the research hypotheses. This chapter revisits the research objectives and their theoretical, and managerial implications. A summary of the results of the literature review and empirical investigation is presented. The discussion focuses on the findings from the hypotheses and research questions, as well as the theoretical and managerial implications. Furthermore, the study's limitations are discussed, and recommendations for future research are suggested.

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

The first research question aimed to study the relationship between a set of factors that constitute the wine tourism experience in Kakheti and the involvement of tourists in the region. The research findings support the conclusion that the factors under study indeed contribute to visitors' engagement with the region, where entertainment, wine, winescape, and education particularly stand out, which together explain more than 80% of wine region involvement, thereby validating the first hypothesis. These results align partially with the studies of Sparks (2007), Charters and Pettigrew (2005), and Bruwer and Huang (2012), which demonstrate a connection between wine as a hedonic product, gastronomy, and involvement. However, for the remaining factors under the study, there is no corresponding literature.

The second research question sought to determine whether the set of factors under study influenced Georgia's Brand Image. The results indicate that only Entertainment and Education slightly influence the image of the destination, suggesting that other unstudied factors may also affect the perception of Georgia's brand image. Therefore, the second hypothesis was also validated. These findings are partially consistent with studies by Madeira et al. (2019) which concluded that the factors that make up the experience such as Entertainment and Education positively impact the image of a wine destination.

The third question focused on understanding the impact of Wine Region Involvement on Georgia's Brand Image. The Results demonstrate that Wine Region Involvement positively and significantly influences the local Brand Image, thus confirming the third hypothesis. These findings align with research conducted by Wu and Liang (2020), which concluded that involvement with wine products can enhance the perception of a destination's image among potential tourists, positively affecting their intentions to visit a wine tourism destination.

Regarding the last question, the results confirm that Wine Region Involvement, as a mediating variable, impacts the perception of the destination's image. Furthermore, the results show that the importance of Winescape, Education, and Entertainment decreases when the mediator variable, Wine Region Involvement, is introduced into the model. This suggests that involvement conditions the impact of these factors, thereby validating the fourth hypothesis. No existing studies were found in the literature that test the mediating role of Wine Region Involvement in relation to experiential factors and destination image. However, De Toni et al. (2022) tested a model where consumer involvement with the wine product positively influences the relationship between symbolic value and purchase intention.

6.2. Managerial Implications

The findings of the study reinforce the significance of wine tourism activity for the economic and social sustainability of rural regions, particularly those with limited resources to attract visitors. This reality is especially relevant in countries like Georgia, which have historically underutilized the potential of wine tourism to maximize revenue from wine production. It is now widely recognized that wine tourism can generate substantial revenue for complementary services such as gastronomy, accommodation, entertainment, physical environment, and cultural activities, particularly among individuals deeply engaged with wine culture. These factors directly impact wine regions, and effectively utilizing them by government or regional stakeholders can significantly increase tourist arrivals and establish a wine region as a major tourist destination.

Moreover, the study reveals that the various activities experienced in the region and the involvement of visitors significantly influence the perception of the destination's image. These insights provide valuable opportunities for stakeholders involved in Georgia's tourism sector, particularly in wine tourism, by offering critical information to better understand and enhance this activity.

From a micro perspective, individual producers can utilize the study's findings to refine or improve the factors that enhance visitor engagement with Kakheti wine region. From an institutional and macro perspective, local and national tourism authorities such as the Georgian National Tourism Administration along with leading tourism companies and qualified guides, can leverage these results to advocate for policies that exempt wine tourism from certain regulations and to highlight the region's wine tourism capabilities. Given that Kakheti is the primary wine-producing region in Georgia, increasing its prominence through these efforts can play a significant role in shaping the country's overall brand image. A strong marketing strategy centered on Kakheti not only enhances the exposure of the region but also elevates Georgia's wine culture on a global scale. Such efforts can significantly impact the development of the wine tourism industry, ultimately enhancing the brand image and destination appeal of wine regions across the country.

6.3. Limitations

Despite the contributions of this study to the understanding of wine tourism phenomenon, several limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting the results. First, the use of a convenience sample restricts the ability to generalize the findings to other wine tourism destinations. It should also be noted that the sample size of 204 visitors was collected during a

limited period and in the low season for wine tourism, specifically in winter when tourist activity is minimal in Kakheti. As a result, sample was smaller than initially anticipated. Additionally, the predominance of Georgian citizens in the sample could be seen as a limitation, although it reflects the region's higher proportion of local visitors compared to foreigners.

Another limitation arises from the study's focus on a single wine region in Georgia, which means the results may vary when considering the specific characteristics of other regions or countries and their visitors. The use of an online tool for data collection also posed challenges in controlling the data collection environment and ensuring the integrity of responses. Lastly, the use of closed questions in the questionnaire may have excluded information that could complement the quantitative data.

6.4. Future Research

Research on the importance of wine tourists' involvement with the wine region remains scarce. Considering the limitations mentioned above, future studies could explore additional experience factors, such as the influence of storytelling or the novelty effect. Exploring the influence of storytelling could deepen the connection between tourists and the wine region, particularly in Georgia, which boasts the world's oldest winemaking history, rich with legends and stories, where wine remains an integral part of local culture to this day. Therefore, by strengthening this bond through storytelling, future research could enhance the significance of these findings, providing an additional tool for marketing Kakheti region as well as other wine tourism destinations and the country as a whole.

Moreover, conducting studies with larger samples and segmenting tourists by demographic and psychographic variables would also be valuable. Applying the same scale to more established wine tourism destinations, where the wine tourism industry is more developed, could provide further insights. Hence, future investigations could also include comparisons between countries from different continents (e.g., New World versus Old World). At the same time, it would be beneficial to understand the supply-side perspective by including producers and governance authorities in the research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A-Online Questionnaire

Section 1 of 3

Determining Factors for the Wine Tourist Involvement and its Impact on the Image of the Destination: The Case of Kakheti, Georgia



This questionnaire is developed by Tekle Berianidze, a master's degree student of Tourism Development & Culture at the University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE). It is designed to collect data for the master's thesis titled ***"Determining Factors for the Wine Tourist Involvement and its Impact on the Image of the Destination: The Case of Kakheti, Georgia"***. The survey aims to determine the impact of wine tourism dimensions in the Kakheti region, the most significant wine-growing region of Georgia, where the largest wineries are located. It seeks to identify factors that most influence tourists' involvement with the region and analyze how this involvement affects the overall image of Georgia as a wine tourism destination.

The survey utilizes a Likert scale for responses, with options ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), including 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), and 4 (agree). This scale will help in accurately capturing your level of agreement with each statement. The application of this survey follows the rules of the General Data Protection Regulation, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of your data. All data collected will be used solely for scientific research purposes.

Your honest input and opinions are very important to us!

Thank you very much for your collaboration.

Estimated completion time: 10 minutes.

Gender *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other

Age of the respondent *

- ☐ 1-20 years old
- ☐ 21-30 years old
- ☐ 31-40 years old
- ☐ 41-50 years old
- ☐ 51-60 years old
- ☐ 61-70 years old
- ☐ 71+
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Nationality *

Your answer

What is your educational level? *

- ☐ High school diploma/GED
- ☐ Associate degree
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree or higher education
- ☐ PhD degree

Are you in Georgia to experience wine and gastronomy? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am a local, living in Georgia

Is this your first visit to Kakheti region? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Do you intend to visit Kakheti region again? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

[Previous](#)

[Following](#)

[Clear form](#)

5 Likert Scale: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree *
(Neutral) ; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
The wine region offers quality wines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tasting the local wines/Qvevri wines was a unique experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The local wines are exactly the type of wine I enjoy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The local wines have exceeded my highest expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The taste of the food in this area is unique, not found in other places	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The local food shows the cuisine heritage of the region/country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local food evokes nostalgia from the past	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The food is genuine, made from homegrown ingredients	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The staff was always willing to help	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff provided attempted personal attention	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff and locals were polite and courteous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The staff and locals were knowledgeable about local wines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experiencing local wines allows me to increase my knowledge about tangible/intangible culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This wine tourism experience disseminates the territory's history and culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending a "Traditional Supra" and learning about "Tamada" (Toastmaker) enhances my understanding of ancient Georgian traditions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tourism improves and enhances the importance of the local culture and heritage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The wine region scenery is attractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The landscape has a rural appeal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

There is a wine
old-world charm in
this region

☐☐☐☐☐

The views from
the wine cellars
are spectacular

☐☐☐☐☐

Drinking local
wines was a
pleasurable
experience

☐☐☐☐☐

I had a great time
participating in the
wine tour

☐☐☐☐☐

My interest in this
region made me
want to visit these
wine cellars

☐☐☐☐☐

Tasting these
wines made me
want to know
more about the
region

☐☐☐☐☐

I was able to learn
about local wine
and its production

☐☐☐☐☐

I was able to
improve my skills
in wine-tasting

☐☐☐☐☐

I was able to learn about the region/country's wine history and past, known as the homeland of wine

☐☐☐☐☐

I was able to discuss the traditional Qvevri wine-making process with the winemaker

☐☐☐☐☐

Wine-related events were one of the highlights of the visit

☐☐☐☐☐

Wine-themed cultural events/festivals were a perfect complement to the visit

☐☐☐☐☐

Taking part in additional activities and experiencing Georgian folklore were a delightful addition to my visit

☐☐☐☐☐

Engaging in leisure activities was an excellent complement to my overall experience

☐☐☐☐☐

The wine region
brand has a
personality that
distinguishes
itself from others

☐☐☐☐☐

The wines from
this region are
unlike any I have
ever tasted

☐☐☐☐☐

The local wine and
food culture is
deeply linked with
the
region/country's
history and culture

☐☐☐☐☐

Tasting
gastronomy and
wine experiences
enhances the local
customs

☐☐☐☐☐

Appendix B-Map of Georgia with Kakheti region highlighted in red



(Source: Amirtravel, 2024)