

# Exploring the Role of Nostalgia in Wine Consumption: The Very Best of Georgia

**Natalia Velikova<sup>1</sup>**

Texas Tech University, USA

[natalia.velikova@ttu.edu](mailto:natalia.velikova@ttu.edu)

**Sophie Ghvanidze**

Hochschule Geisenheim University, Germany

[sopiko.ghvanidze@hs-gm.de](mailto:sopiko.ghvanidze@hs-gm.de)

**Phatima Mamardashvili**

International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University, Georgia

[p.mamardashvili@iset.ge](mailto:p.mamardashvili@iset.ge)

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## Abstract

*The current paper focuses on the role of nostalgic memories in wine consumption behavior. Core to the present research is the proposition that nostalgic memories account for the relationships between consumers' perceptions of product quality and emotional feelings that are evoked while consuming that product (Georgian wine, in our case). Data were collected via an online survey of Russian and Ukrainian consumers (the two major markets of Georgian wine export). Findings suggest that nostalgic memories mediate the relationships between product quality perceptions and consumer emotional response to wine consumption. This effect seem to work not only for consumers with personal nostalgic memories of a region, but also for those who do not have autobiographical memories of it. We thus theorize that nostalgic memories may refer to the image of a region as it was formed back in the past. Future research should further explore this proposition.*

**Keywords:** nostalgic memories, quality perceptions, emotional benefits, Georgia

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## INTRODUCTION

Although the scientific approach to the phenomenon of nostalgia has been suggested centuries ago (Johannes Hofer coined the term in 1688), its definition and the research inquiry towards the concept have changed greatly over time. The modern view suggests that nostalgia is a sentimentality for the past, typically for a certain period of time or a place with happy memories (Boym, 2002). Nostalgic memories are typically associated with a yearning for the past, its personalities, and events, especially the 'good old days' or a 'warm childhood' (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008).

Within the last decade, nostalgia has become a topic of increased research interest in various disciplines, such as advertising, tourism, consumer behavior, as well as mass communication and political sciences (several prominent politicians employed nostalgia to win elections). Nostalgic memories have been previously studied in the wine business scholarly literature,

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [natalia.velikova@ttu.edu](mailto:natalia.velikova@ttu.edu)

albeit only by a handful of researchers (e.g., Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Sheridan, Duarte Alonso, & Scherrer, 2009). Furthermore, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no previous wine consumption or wine tourism study examined the phenomenon of nostalgia as the focal point of their research. To further explore the role of nostalgic memories in wine consumer behavior, the present study pursues a quantitative approach to draw inferences concerning the relationships between wine quality perceptions and emotional benefits of wine consumption.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the marketing academic community, empirical research has been directed towards the understanding of the role of nostalgic memories, and consequently, the application of this knowledge to the development of marketing strategies. For example, using the disposition theory of mood, Orth and Gal (2012) explored nostalgic brands appeals to consumers. Their findings suggest that nostalgic (rather than non-nostalgic) brands boost consumers' mood, which is the major driver of behavioral intentions. In a later study of persuasive mechanisms of nostalgia, Orth and Gal (2014) found the ability of visual clues (a brand's packages) to trigger personal nostalgia.

Consumer research suggests that nostalgic memories often have emotional components that accompany retrieval of these memories (Buchanan, 2007; Levine, Lench, & Safer, 2009). Nostalgia triggers a change in people's affective states (Holbrook & Schindler, 1996). When remembering past experiences, people retrieve not just a dry recollection of the events but also the emotions associated with those events (Levine, Lench, & Safer, 2009). In other words, people re-live their past experiences through the emotions they have experienced in those circumstances.

In the wine context, emotions have been explored from a myriad of perspectives. The condensed format of this conference paper allows us to focus only on emotions associated with consumption. Bruwer and Alant (2009) studied wine consumption as a *hedonic experience* – “a sensual and pleasurable activity aimed at personal enjoyment” (p. 235) Further, referring to wine tourism, the researchers suggest that if this experience is remembered, perhaps even invoking feelings of *nostalgia*, there is a good chance that these wine tourists may share their memories with others. Given the widespread of social media, the prospect of nostalgic memories sharing (and thus, influencing others) becomes even more expected nowadays.

Orth, Wolf and Dodd (2005) studied dimensions of wine region equity. Specifically, their study explored what consumption values drive purchase attitudes and behavior. Out of the six distinct dimensions of equity profile (quality, price, social, emotional, environmental, and humane values), this conference paper focuses only on two dimensions - quality perceptions and emotional benefits.

Given the inherent connection between nostalgia and emotions, we propose that nostalgic memories can trigger hedonic (emotional) feelings during consumption, as well as perceptions of product quality. We further theorize that nostalgia relates to emotions and quality perceptions

directly, and additionally, nostalgic memories function as a mediator in the quality perceptions-emotions relationship.

Lastly, it is important to note that Muehling and Sprott (2004) caution that while nostalgic thoughts may be generated from personally remembered past (i.e., ‘personal nostalgia’), nostalgia is not restricted to autobiographical memories. Nostalgia may be associated with vicariously experienced events (referred to as ‘historic nostalgia’). This is particularly relevant to the current study, as we are not interested in autobiographical memories *per se*, but rather in a broader context of an *image* of a region created in consumers’ minds; and how nostalgic memories of that image affect consumption of its iconic product - wine.

### **CONTEXT: GEORGIA – THE WINE REPUBLIC OF THE SOVIET UNION**

To empirically test the relationships outlined above, the Republic of Georgia - a small country located at the crossroads of East and West - was chosen as the study site. Georgia was one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union from its inception in 1922 to its breakup in 1991.

In the minds of the Soviet people, Georgia has always had a special sentiment - everyone’s favorite, a privileged republic, the darling of the Soviet press. One of the reasons for a glossy postcard image of the Soviet Georgia was its location, which made it a favorable resort area in a country with mostly harsh climate. Due to its optimal weather conditions, the “sunny Georgia” - as it was widely referred to - has become a tourist Mecca of the Soviet Union. The most prestigious and luxurious resorts in Gagra and Pitsunda (which were part of Georgia in the Soviet era) were much favored by the government elite and an impossible, romantic dream of ordinary people.

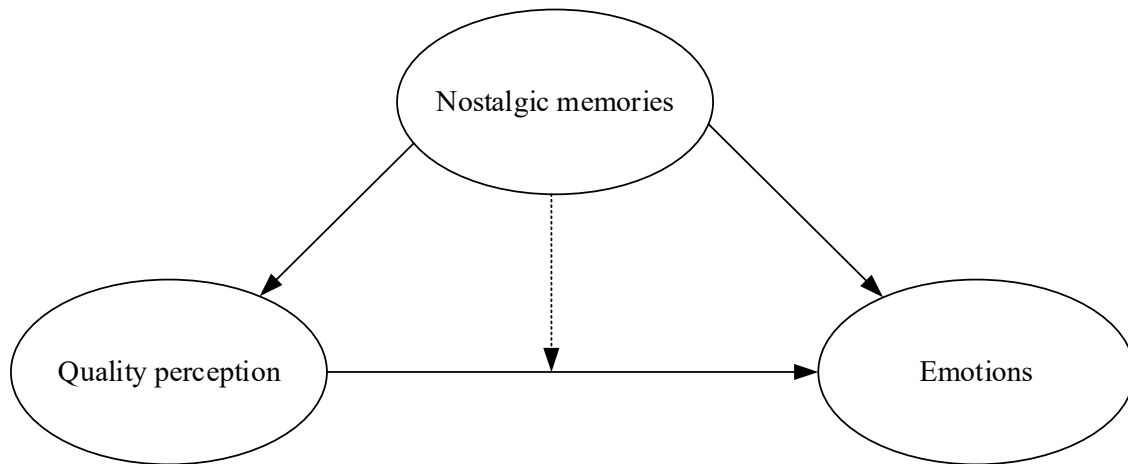
Georgia has also been famed for its natural beauty. The dramatic Caucasus Mountain ranges (the highest in Europe), with hairpin roads and hidden villages, the legendary Borjomi springs, magnificent skiing resorts and breathtaking sea beaches – these fairytale-like images in the otherwise gloomy Soviet culture have been imprinted in the Soviet people’s minds. Georgia was perceived as the most hospitable nation, full of happy, cheerful people. The image of Georgia was inseparable from its beautiful polyphonic music, delicious food, and of course, the country’s staple – wine.

Since the ancient times, Georgia has been known as a country of wine. It is considered the birthplace of wine; and Georgians have long been proud to be the oldest winemaking nation in the world. Allegedly, in 1945 at the Yalta Conference, Joseph Stalin (who was a native of Georgia) treated Sir Winston Churchill with Georgian wine *Khvanchkara*, and afterwards the British minister became a devoted enthusiast of this wine.

In the Soviet times, no discussion about of Georgia would be complete without mentioning wine. Simply put, wine was synonymous with Georgia. This narrative of Soviet Georgia shaped a public image of the country, which makes it a perfect case to study nostalgic memories in the wine context.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The current work extends research of the nostalgia phenomenon in that it focuses on the role of nostalgic memories in wine consumption behavior. Core to the present research is the proposition that nostalgic memories account for the relationships between consumers' perceptions of product quality and emotional feelings that are evoked while consuming that product (Georgian wine, in this case). Figure 1 visualizes the conceptual model.



**Figure 1. Conceptual model**

## METHODOLOGY

### *Procedures*

Data were collected via an online survey of wine consumers in Russia and Ukraine. The choice of the sample was driven by the Georgian wine export statistics. Although the country exports its wine to over 50 countries, the latest figures from the Georgian National Wine Agency (2019) reveal that Russia still remains the top export destination, with a total of 41,112,235 bottles; and Ukraine takes the second place (6,766,841 bottles). These two markets alone account for 74% of the total export of Georgian wine. Given the importance of these markets to the Georgian industry, it seemed only logical to survey consumers in these countries to assess their attitudes towards Georgian wine. Consumer panels were provided by two large international market research companies with divisions in Russia and Ukraine. A total of 800 complete surveys were collected and used for analysis, 400 in each market respectively.

### *Measures*

Measures for dependent and independent variables were borrowed from previous literature. The assessment of *nostalgic memories* relied on the work of Muehling and Spratt (2004). Although the original scale was adapted to fit the context of the current work, the scale items loaded strongly on a single factor, with  $\alpha = 0.96$ . *Quality perceptions* were assessed with a series of items measuring perceptions of Georgian wines. The items were borrowed from a study of consumer attitudes towards regional wines by Kolyesnikova, Dodd, and Duhan (2008). Finally, assessing consumers' *emotional benefits of consumption* (evoking of good feelings) relied on the work of Orth, Wolf, and Dodd (2005).

### Data Analysis

A series of regression analysis were conducted based on the method suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Orth, Campana, and Malkewitz (2010). First, the mediating variable of *nostalgic memories* was regressed on the independent variable *quality perceptions*. Second, *nostalgic memories* was regressed on the dependent variable *emotions*. Third, independent variable *quality perceptions* was regressed on the dependent variable *emotions*. Lastly, the dependent variable *emotions* was regressed on both the independent variable and the mediator.

## RESULTS

### Sample Description

Forty percent of the sample were male, and 60% were female. Respondents had higher levels of education, with over half of the sample (54.6%) having an undergraduate degree. With regards to wine consumption and knowledge, the majority of the sample (59%) self-accessed their wine knowledge as basic ('know the names of wine styles, wine regions, but can't identify differences between them'). Almost one-third drink wine at least once a week or more frequently; yet the same percent of the respondents consume wine only once in a few months or several times a year. When asked specifically about Georgian wine, the frequency of consumption was significantly lower, with the almost two-thirds of the sample consuming Georgian wines only occasionally, once every few months (Table 1).

**Table 1. Frequency of wine consumption**

	How often do you consume wine? (%)	How often do you consume Georgian wine? (%)
Every day	1.6	0.0
Several days a week	11.6	1.1
About once a week	18.9	2.9
Once every two weeks	17.3	5.9
About once a month	19.5	13.3
Once in a couple of months	16.6	21.3
A few times a year	14.5	43.4
Never	0.0	12.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Dependent and independent variables were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, anchored between 1 ('*strongly disagree*') and 5 ('*strongly agree*'). Participants were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with statements "*Georgian wines are...*" Mean scores, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients are depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2. Quality perceptions, emotional benefits, and nostalgic memories of Georgian wines**

	Mean	SD
<i>Quality perceptions</i> ( $\alpha = 0.86$ )		
good quality	4.06	0.80
good value for money	3.79	0.83
popular in Ukraine/Russia	3.88	0.85
well-known in Ukraine/Russia	3.93	0.90
appropriately priced	3.44	0.87
widely available	3.61	0.92
world-class	3.91	0.82
<i>Emotional benefits/evoke good feelings</i> ( $\alpha = 0.92$ )		
make me want to drink it	3.95	0.86
make me feel relaxed	4.02	0.81
make me feel good	4.13	0.78
give me pleasure	4.13	0.78
<i>Nostalgic memories</i> ( $\alpha = 0.96$ )		
remind me of the past	3.09	1.17
help me recall pleasant memories	3.51	1.06
make me think of the time when I was younger	2.98	1.20
make me feel nostalgic	3.09	1.16
make me reminisce about a previous time	3.13	1.14
evoke fond memories	3.52	1.07
are a pleasant reminder of the past	3.18	1.15
bring back memories of good times from the past	3.23	1.16
remind me of the good old days	3.20	1.16

When *nostalgic memories* were regressed on *quality perceptions* and *emotions*, beta coefficients were significant (equations *a* and *b*). *Quality perceptions* were a significant predictor for *emotions* (equation *c*). When both *quality perceptions* and mediator *nostalgic memories* were included in the regression model, the impact of the variables slightly decreased - however, they remained significant predictors for *emotions*. Furthermore, the explained variance increased from 9% to 44% (Table 3). This finding supports the initial proposition of the study that nostalgic memories account for the relation between the quality perceptions and emotional benefits for consumption of Georgian wine.

**Table 3. Mediating effect of nostalgic memories**

	$\beta$ (standardized)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	F	R <sup>2</sup> adj.
a) QUALPERC = f(NOSTALGY)	0.31	9.28	.000	86.215	0.09
b) EMOTION = f(NOSTALGY)	0.37	11.33	.000	128.29	0.14
c) EMOTION = f(QUALPERC)	0.64	23.65	.000	559.56	0.41
d) EMOTION = f(QUALPERC, NOSTALGY)					
QUALPERC	0.58	20.97	.000	319.32	0.44
NOSTALGY	0.19	6.85	.000		

## **DISCUSSION**

The current study suggests that nostalgic memories mediate the relationships between product quality perceptions and consumer emotional response. By itself, nostalgia affects quality perceptions and emotions (evoking good feelings while drinking wine). The more intense the feelings of nostalgia towards the region, the better the perceptions of the quality of wine from that region; and the higher the perceptions of the quality of wine, the more consumers are going to enjoy the consumption of wine from that region. Most importantly, however, is the fact that nostalgic memories play a crucial role in these relationships. The casual chain of relationships means that nostalgia affects wine quality perceptions, and quality perceptions affect evoking good feelings while drinking the wine.

This effect seems to work for people who have visited Georgia in the past (20% of the sample), as well as those people who have never been to Georgia. We thus theorize that nostalgic memories can refer to the image of the region as it was formed back in the time. Future research should further explore this proposition.

Moreover, it is interesting that nostalgic memories have such powerful and long-lasting effect in the consumption context. During the Soviet times, wine choices were extremely limited, with the vast majority of production coming from Georgia. Back then, preferences for Georgian wine were obvious. Nowadays, however, with the abundance of wines from different world regions available on the Russian and Ukrainian markets, consumers clearly opt for a variety. Yet, preferences for Georgian wines are still apparent – largely due to nostalgic memories, as this research shows.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that despite the current political tension between Russia and Georgia, Russian consumers still have very positive perceptions of Georgian wine. One possible explanation could be that in spite of all the adversities the country has faced within the last century, consumers share good memories about their Soviet past (Kovtiak, 2018) and retain good images formed during those times.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The finding reported here make several important contributions on research on nostalgia in wine marketing. We take the concept of nostalgia one step further and suggest that nostalgic memories can be based on the image of a region created in consumers' minds, regardless of whether or not consumers have their own (autobiographical) memories of that region. For the academe, these findings signal the need for further research of the nostalgia phenomenon in the wine context. For the industry, the study is of value for regional brand development practices as it highlights important relationships between emotional consumption, quality perceptions, and nostalgic memories.

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