

The Consumer Centric Study of Neera; A Coconut Treasure House Of Untapped Potentials

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Abstract

Coconut is a very popular member of palm family-Arecaceae. It is the only accepted species of genus *cocos*. It is also a part of daily diet of so many people around the world, especially Kerala. This is a very popular fruit as it has some cultural and religious significance. Every part of this fruit is use in different works. Therefore it is called 'Kalpavriksha' in local language. Neera is a product that is coming from the flower of coconut. It is a nectar type liquid. Neera is sweet, translucent in color and also has very high nutritional value. It is a very good source of vitamins, minerals and amino acid. Neera syrup is used as a health drink in connection with Ayurveda and other systems of medicine. Palm gur (jaggery), Palm sugar and other by products are produced by heating fresh neera and concentrating it. Neera, an unfermented sweet sap from coconut flowers, is turning out to the latest organic food trend in Kerala. Neera is a delicious health juice containing sugar, vitamins and minerals. As the consumers have so many health drinks choices, Neera will need to fight very hard in order to achieve their share of throats. In this context the present study tries to analyse the customer's attitude towards this innovative product in terms of their awareness, perception and satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: coconut, neera, sap, CDB, consumer satisfaction, NPS

INTRODUCTION

The coconut farmers are in a very precarious situation for quite some time due to several problems in the production and marketing of coconut and its value added products. Frequent fluctuation and fall in price of coconut, severity of many pests and diseases, rocketing escalation of cost of inputs, marketing issues of value added products etc. are a few to cite. Coconut plantations were subjected to utter negligence and resultantly coconut farming becomes a non-profitable enterprise. When monetary value and profitability are the criteria for nurturing crops, many other crops made inroads and coconut is getting substituted. In fact it is not a replacement of a tree but a replacement of a culture. (Misra, 2016).

Delinking coconut economy from the clutches of copra coconut oil over dependency, coupled with developing and popularizing more value added products from coconut has been brought out as a viable strategy for regaining the lost glory of coconut. Coconut Development Board(CDB) is instrumental in advocating this message. Neera is the latest addition in the array of value added products which holds the potential to revitalize the prospects of coconut farmers of India.

Neera, the sweet sap of the coconut palm has a high nutritive value, delicious taste and a good flavor. It is obtained by trapping the unopened inflorescence of the coconut palm. It is nonalcoholic and notorious drink. Neera is a source of sugars, minerals and

vitamins. It is sweet, oyster white in color and translucent. It is tapped from the coconut inflorescence & is filtered, pasteurized and bio preservatives added to preserve the product. Treated neera can be preserved in cans up to 2 months at room temperature. It can also be packed in tetra packs or glass bottles.

In India, coconut is being cultivated by ten million families. Let us consider the case of Kerala where existing coconut palm population is around 1800 lakh. If a minimum of 1% of these palms are utilized for neera tapping, there will be 18 lakh palms for this purpose. A Neera tapper can ideally tap around 15-20 palms per day. Neera production in Kerala can contribute substantially to the Gross State Domestic Production (GSDP). If 50% of the consumer price of Neera is offered to coconut farmer, 25% to Neera technician and remaining 25% towards processing, packaging and marketing costs, it can result in an all round increase in the incomes of all stakeholders.

Globally Neera and its value added products are manufactured by all the major coconut producing countries except India. The major players in the field are Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Srilanka and Vietnam. The major export destinations are USA, Canada, Norway, France, Middle East, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Export of Neera and palm sugar has shown a surging trend in Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand as a healthy natural product. In Philippines, projects on coconut sugar were initiated as early in 1995. Indonesia produced over 6 lakh MT of palm sugar in 2011. The production of palm sugar in Indonesia was estimated to reach 10 lakh MT in 2012.

Neera production will undoubtedly help to contribute to the GDP and also the rural economy of the country. It can generate rural employment and provide better remuneration to coconut farmers and the Neera technicians. A community based planned production of Neera and products like palm jaggery and palm sugar under the auspices of Coconut Producer Federations can bring into the market different value added products from Neera and establish niche markets for each product. (Jose, 2013)

Research Problem

Indian coconut sector was considered as an oil driven market and therefore not as much of progress have been taken place in the area of value addition in the coconut sector. And this has been acting as a obstacle in unbridle its right potential. During this context, the Governments of Kerala in association with Coconut Development Board started to produce and market a delicious health drink from coconut, called Neera and to give more focus on value addition in the coconut processing sector and as a part of this, measures have been taken to promote Neera as an energy drink as well as a sweet beverage which has several nutritional features and vast market potential. Therefore the present study tries to determine the Kerala Consumers' perception and satisfaction towards the use of Neera.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the perception of the respondents regarding Neera.
2. To identify the production process of Neera.
3. To evaluate the satisfaction of the respondents towards Neera.

Research Methodology

To complete this study primary as well as secondary source of information is used. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 40 respondents from Ernakulam district. The sampling technique employed for the research purpose was

stratified random sampling. For the calculation and analysis of data, statistical tools and techniques like Percentage, Net Promoter Score(NPS) were used.

Potential of Neera products

We are living in an era where consumers are more conscious of health and quality. If cost was the deciding factor for purchase in the 20th century; aspirations, health and quality decide the purchasing decisions today. With healthy nutrient rich products like Neera, developing and establishing a market space, both in domestic and export market offers immense potential. The increase in the number of people with obesity, diabetes and dental caries is also alarming and Neera and coconut palm sugar can provide a healthy viable option. Neera and its products are also rich in minerals and vitamins. (K Muralidharan, 2013).

Nutritional Composition of Neera

Neera is rich in nutritional properties. Composition of Neera is given below:

Table.1 -Nutritional Composition of Neera

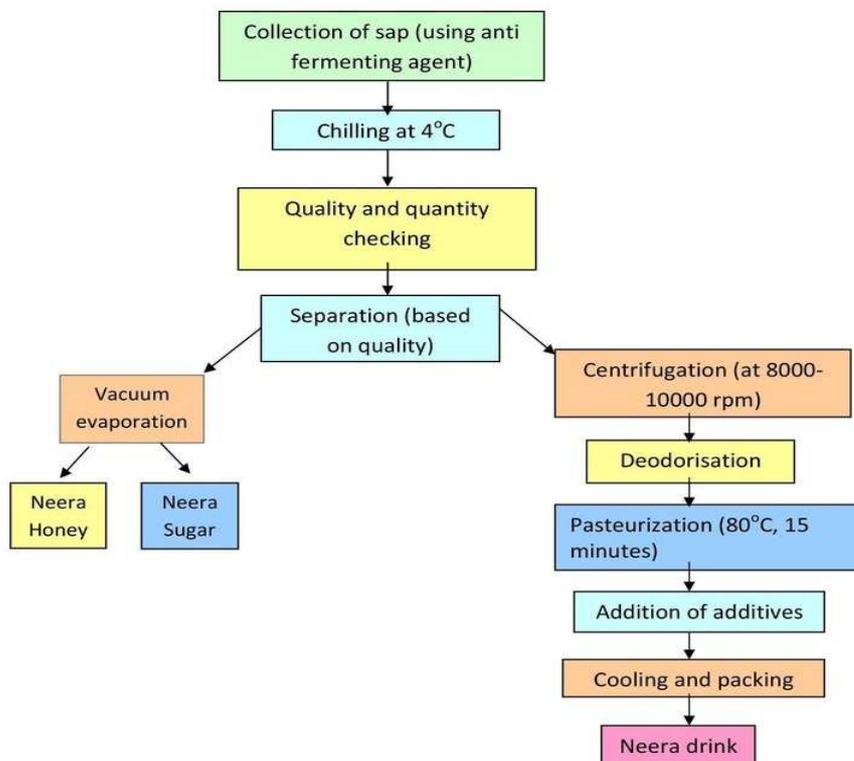
Total solids(g/100ml)	15.2-19.7
pH	3.9-4.7
Specific gravity	1.058-1.077
Total sugar(g/100ml)	14.40
Original reducing sugar(g/100ml)	5.58
Total reducing sugar (g/100ml)	9.85
Total ash(g/100ml)	0.11-0.41
Citric acid(g/100ml)	0.50
Alcohol in %	nil
Iron (g/100ml)	0.15
Phosphorus (g/100ml)	7.59
Ascorbic acid(mg/100ml)	16-30
Total Protein(g/100ml)	0.23-0.32

Processing of Neera

Neera is processed and converted into drinkable form after various processes. The process to convert coconut sap into Neera is given below:

Fig. 1 - Steps in processing of Neera

Flow diagram showing processing of fresh Neera



Data Analysis & Interpretations

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Demographic Factors

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	28	70
	Female	12	30
	Total	40	100
Age	Below 20 yrs	5	12.5
	21-40 yrs	24	60
	41-60 yrs	11	27.5
	Total	40	100
Education	Plus Two	2	5
	UG	8	20
	PG	16	40
	Professional	14	35
	Total	40	100
Monthly Income	10000-20000	7	17.5
	20000-30000	15	37.5
	30000-40000	9	22.5

	< 40000	9	22.5
	Total	40	100
Occupation	Student	3	7.5
	Self-Employed	7	17.5
	Govt. Service	13	32.5
	Pvt. Service	13	32.5
	Business	4	10
	Total	40	100

Source: Primary Data

The table 2 shows descriptive statistics of all the demographic variables considered for the study. As per the gender of the respondents, 70% belong to male and only 30% belong to female. As per the age wise distribution, 60% of the respondents are of 21-40 years of age and 27.5% of them are of 41- 60 years of age. According to the table, majority of the respondents i.e. 40% are post graduates and 35% are professionals. It is followed by 20% of graduates and 5% of having plus two. Among the respondents, 32.5% belongs to private service sector and Govt. sector followed by 17.5% in the self – employed sector and the rest in other sectors. Monthly income wise classification shows that 37.5% belongs to 20000-30000 income group, 22.5% each belongs to 30000- 40000 income group and in above 40000 groups balance in the group of 10000-20000.

Net Promoter Score

Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a metric of customer experience, often thought of as the loyalty metric. Most enterprises calculate both NPS and customer satisfaction, often using different scales for each. NPS technique is used to calculate the satisfaction level of consumers who purchased Neera. For this the responses are grouped to 3 major heads named Detractors, Passives and Promoters on the basis of their responses. The responses are given below:

Table 3: Level of satisfaction

Response	Frequency
Highly satisfied	4
Satisfied	16
Neutral	6
Less satisfied	10
Dissatisfied	4
Total	40

Source: Primary Data

Consumers who responded as highly satisfied and satisfied are grouped to Promoters and neutral responses are grouped into Passives and less satisfied and dissatisfied are coming under Detractors. The matrix is shown below:

Detractors	Passives	Promoters
14	6	20

The following table shows the NPS value for the responses.

Table 4: NPS Matrix

Group	Value	NPS Value
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Detractors	14	15
Passives	6	
Promoters	20	
Total	40	

Source: Primary Data

It shows the NPS as 15. This shows the relationship between promoters, passives and detractors. As the value of NPS is more than the value of detractors, it can be interpreted as the respondents are satisfied with the use and consumption of Neera.

Findings

As there are no information and advertisements are available in the public media, most of the people are not aware of this innovative health drink. The perception of respondents regarding the Neera health drink and its features is equal to the average level. The satisfaction level of consumers is high.

Conclusion

Neera is safe & perhaps the best health drink for patients suffering from diabetes. Beside of the drink various types of value added products and confectionaries like cake, ice cream, and sweets can be produced from this sap which has low GI index, and this is a very good news for diabeticians who are afraid of taking such sweet foods. Now they can easily take their favorite confectioneries without any harmful effect on blood sugar level. (Misra, 2016).

The study concluded respondents' awareness regarding Neera is below average level but their satisfaction is above average level. It shows that the health qualities and non- alcoholic features of Neera drink will make consumers more satisfied with the drink. As there is a lot of ignorance and wrong perceptions regarding Neera energy drink among consumers, the results suggest the need to create awareness regarding the benefits of Neera and correct some wrong perceptions that consumers have. Hence, it is recommended that the Neera marketers should concentrate on improving the quality and brand image of the Neera and at the same time they should concentrate seriously on the sales promotional activities and awareness programmes. (Deepa Chandran, 2016)

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