

Disseminating information on MSG safety and benefits

Approach

GRI417-DMA

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Performance

GRI417-DMA

Activities to promote a correct understanding of MSG

The Ajinomoto Group is the world's first company to commercialize an umami substance called glutamic acid (a type of amino acid) as a seasoning. We have promoted the benefits of monosodium glutamate (MSG), the sodium salt of glutamic acid, across the world. MSG offers a variety of value. MSG improves the flavor preference of low-salt foods, shortens cooking time, and contributes to reducing meal costs at schools and other facilities.

At the same time, MSG has been the subject of nebulous anxieties for many years as a purported chemical harmful to health. Labels such as "additive-free," "chemical-free seasoning," or "No MSG," have led to unsubstantiated rumors and misunderstandings among consumers that continue to this day.

We see a tremendous opportunity today in how consumers around the world communicate online, as well as in the rising global interest related to food safety, food security, and health. We are seizing on this opportunity to leverage various media in actively sharing information to consumers based on facts and scientifically backed evidence. Not only do we resolve misunderstandings about safety, but we also engage in initiatives to spread information about the benefits of MSG to the world, including MSG's role in improving flavor, reducing sodium intake, and improving nutrition for the elderly.

Communication activities across the world

The Ajinomoto Group began actively conducting communication activities by launching the World Umami Forum (WUF) in September 2018 in the United States.

Conducting risk communications in Japan

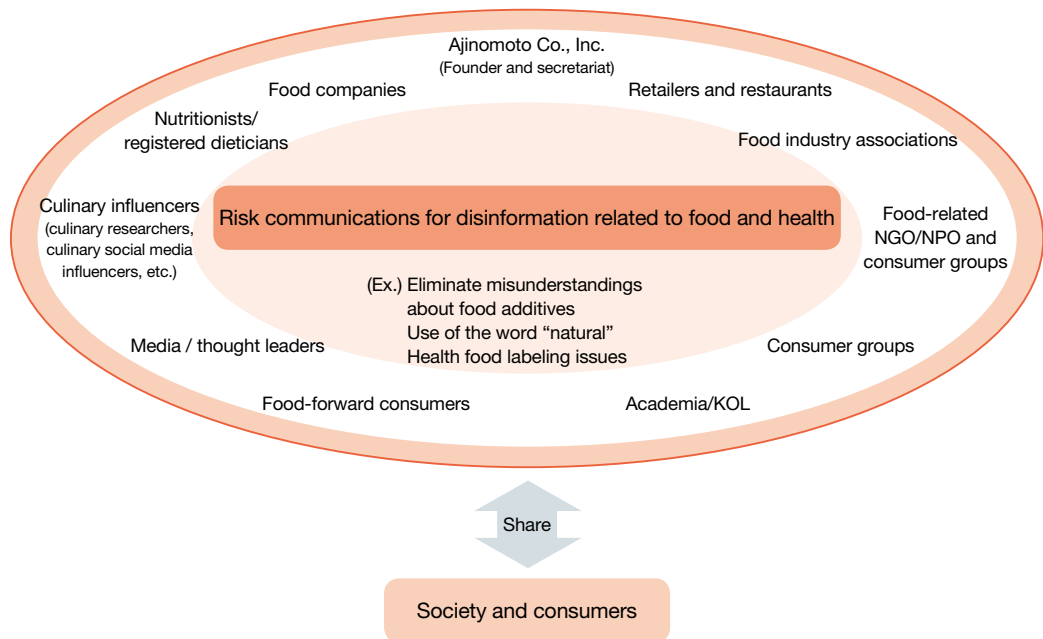
Ajinomoto Co., Inc. held three media conferences in April, July, and November of 2019.

In the first media conference, we hosted a discussion among external experts in food additives on the topic, "Social Issues in Food Labeling." The panelists addressed misconceptions related to MSG and issues related to additive-free labeling on food products. The second conference included a panel of experts on MSG safety and the reputation of MSG. The main topic of this discussion was, "How does fake news propagate?" Through these first two conferences, participants learned of the significant gap between the desire of experts to communicate the safety of MSG and the desire of consumers for peace of mind. Participants also learned that debates of "right" or "wrong" are not likely to convince consumers.

The third conference consisted of a lecture and panel discussion on the theme "Risk Communication for Today." Details included how to engage in communications that prevent rumor-based panics among consumer in this age of social media and the flood of disinformation. Here, we announced our establishment of a new opportunity for risk communication that goes beyond organizational, market, industry, and personal perspectives, and we declared our commitment to work with consumers to share correct information related to food and health, contributing to a healthy, more abundant society. We sponsor forums for consumers to hold discussions and dispel the risks of disinformation related to food and health.

Assurance of Product Safety

Proposed risk communication framework of the Ajinomoto Group



Positive sharing of information in Nigeria

In Nigeria, religions and cultures differ between the north and south. Consumer preconceptions about umami seasoning *AJI-NO-MOTO*[®] also vary widely between the north and south. In the north, 80% of consumers have a positive attitude toward *AJI-NO-MOTO*[®]. In contrast, 70% of people in the south have negative preconceptions due to misunderstandings and biases. To dispel misconceptions among southern consumers, the Ajinomoto Group engaged in a variety of activities. We sponsored seminars to convey information based on scientific information, working with university professors to communicate with doctors, nutritionists, home economics teachers, and other influential individuals. We also joined with leaders of medical organizations as guests on live radio programs, answering the questions of listeners. We appointed two influencers who participated in the WUF as ambassadors, disseminating information via live streaming, cooking videos, and other social media content.

Children in Nigeria suffer from poor nutrition. At the same time, the country has the worst rate of lifestyle-related diseases in the world, caused in part by excessive salt intake. We will continue promoting the salt-reduction benefits of using *AJI-NO-MOTO*[®], contributing to the healthy lives of the Nigerian people.

Sharing information with stakeholders in Vietnam

Subsequent to the WUF, AJINOMOTO VIETNAM CO., LTD. has been engaging in communications tailored to individual stakeholders.

For public institutions, the company provides presentation materials that discuss the safety of MSG and ways to reduce salt intake through MSG. These presentation materials are used in meetings and workshops hosted by the Ministry of Health General Department of Preventive Medicine to communicate information to healthcare workers.

For consumers, the company provided information to the press regarding WUF, encouraging wider coverage of correct information about MSG through articles in 37 different publications.

The company is also educating employees about MSG and umami based on WUF content.

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Umami and MSG promotions in the United States

After the WUF, the Ajinomoto Group has continued to publicize information to our various stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

Our work with registered dietitians is one example. We sponsored a booth at the Food & Nutrition Conference and Expo where we offered samples of plant-based meals using umami to reduce sodium while maintaining deliciousness. Visitors learned that they could ingest less salt without any compromises in taste. In addition to visiting culinary schools to educate students and instructors on basic information on MSG and umami, we sponsored cooking competitions to stimulate creativity in the use of umami in cooking. We are also striving to communicate with millennials interested in food.

These initiatives and others have raised significant interest and positive awareness of MSG in the United States. Surveys have shown an improvement in perception regarding MSG among registered dietitians and food-forward consumers. We will continue to appeal to the safety and sodium-reduction benefits of MSG, suggesting MSG as a means toward delicious, satisfying meals.

Survey results in the United States

Segment	KPI	FY2018 Result	FY2019 Result
Registered dietitians	Believe MSG is safe to eat	52%	66%
	Likely to say MSG is safe if asked	32%	47%
	Understand MSG offers umami	50%	67%
Food-forward consumers	Umami awareness	66%	86%
	Actively avoid MSG	39%	31%
	Believe MSG is safe to eat	65%	69%

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▶ Merriam-Webster

TOPIC

Using social media to spread and encourage a correct understanding of MSG (U.S.A.)

In the 1970s, the United States experienced a phenomenon called Chinese Restaurant Syndrome (CRS). Stories spread of the mistaken assumption of a relationship between MSG in Chinese food and headaches, palpitations, etc. CRS fanned the flames of anti-Asian sentiment at the time, becoming a socially accepted negative attitude toward MSG. Although the controversy continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, experts from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives of the UN made public statements declaring the safety of MSG. Using facts based on solid, scientifically verified data, these experts rejected any causal relationship between MSG and CRS. Unfortunately, once a misunderstanding has taken hold, it is difficult to convince consumers of the truth. Even today, many restaurants and food manufacturers use the “No MSG” label, indicating an ongoing concern about the safety of MSG.

In January 2020, the Ajinomoto Group launched a campaign using the hashtag, “#RedefineCRS.” We produced a video promoted widely across social media featuring a famous chef, a well-known celebrity, and a medical doctor to raise questions about the common perception of CRS, while letting people know that MSG is a completely safe ingredient. We received feedback immediately from many people and the campaign was covered in numerous media outlets, turning into a big movement. After looking into the facts, authoritative dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster revised the definition of CRS, making the following changes.

1. Added a statement that the term was outdated and, in some cases, racially offensive
2. Added an annotation that the relationship between supposed symptoms and MSG has not been proven in studies

Old

Merriam-Webster SINCE 1828 Chinese restaurant syndrome
 DICTIONARY THESAURUS

Chinese restaurant syndrome
 noun

Definition of Chinese restaurant syndrome
 : a group of symptoms (such as numbness of the neck, arms, and back with headache, dizziness, and palpitations) that is held to affect susceptible persons eating food and especially Chinese food heavily seasoned with monosodium glutamate

First Known Use of Chinese restaurant syndrome
 1958, in the meaning defined above

New

Merriam-Webster SINCE 1828 Chinese restaurant syndrome
 DICTIONARY THESAURUS

Chinese restaurant syndrome
 noun

Definition of Chinese restaurant syndrome
dated, sometimes offensive
 : a group of symptoms held to affect susceptible persons eating food heavily seasoned with monosodium glutamate : MSG SYMPTOM COMPLEX

NOTE: The term *Chinese restaurant syndrome* was coined in the late 1960s following reports of people having bad reactions to food seasoned with monosodium glutamate in Chinese restaurants. Research in the years since has failed to establish a clear link between those adverse reactions and the consumption of MSG, and the term *Chinese restaurant syndrome* has been criticized as misleading and potentially offensive. It has been replaced in medical literature by *MSG symptom complex*.

First Known Use of Chinese restaurant syndrome
 1968, in the meaning defined above

As with the “#RedefineCRS” campaign, the Ajinomoto Group will continue to dispel consumer misunderstandings, engaging in communications across various channels to spread the message of the value of MSG to as many people as possible.