Blood donation by Afro-Caribbeans living in France: What are the challenges for marketing communications?

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Abstract

• Objectives
The diversity of the population living in France represents a major challenge for the Etablissement Français du Sang (French National Blood Service). Indeed, African and Caribbean blood donors are under-represented, resulting in a shortage of blood for transfusion due to rare phenotypes in this population. The aim of this research is to understand the barriers and motivations regarding blood donation in this population from a cross-cultural (Afro-Caribbean and Caucasian) perspective.

• Methodology
Two qualitative studies were carried out with non-donors (ten Afro-Caribbean non-donors and eight Caucasian non-donors) and donors (eight Afro-Caribbean donors and ten Caucasian donors) respectively. Non-donors are individuals eligible to donate blood but who have never done so in France. Donors are those who have already given blood in France.

• Results
The literature review provides an initial set of findings on the barriers and motivations of African and Caribbean populations. Then, the results of two qualitative studies show that certain specificities exist in this population: the “mistrust linked to the use of blood and the belief that it can be sold” (barrier), the “need to give blood to treat sickle cell disease and Afro-Caribbean patients” (motivation), “the importance of giving blood to apply the religious teachings of giving” (motivation). The article also concludes that there are a number of similarities with the Caucasian population. In terms of similarity, “lack of solicitation” and “lack of information” are the main barriers in both populations. As far as motivations are concerned, “the desire to save lives” and “the possibility of needing it one day” are motivations shared by both populations.

• Managerial implications
This research helps to show that blood donation promotion campaigns should be culturally adapted to be more effective, by removing barriers to blood donation and emphasizing specific motivations. Blood donation organizations need to communicate on “the scarcity of Afro-Caribbean blood”, but also on “the need for blood to treat sickle-cell anemia”, and to reassure Afro-Caribbean populations about “the use made of the blood collected”. A series of concrete actions to target “non-donors” and “donors” of Afro-Caribbean origin are proposed at the end of this article.

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• **Originality**

This research is original in three respects: 1) the subject of Afro-Caribbean blood donation has only been addressed twice in France, despite the fact that immigration from Africa and the Caribbean is very significant; 2) this is the first research study to compare Afro-Caribbeans and Caucasians; 3) it focuses not only on “non-donors” but also on “donors” from both populations.

• **Keywords:** blood donation, Afro-Caribbean, Caucasian, barrier, motivation, communication.

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Over the last few decades, migration from Africa to Europe has increased considerably. In 2020, 47.5% of the immigrants living in France were born in Africa. However, this migratory flow is not without consequences for the French healthcare system in general, and blood donation in particular. Whether of French or foreign nationality, people whose ethnic origins lie on the African continent often have specific bloodlines spanning several generations. In fact, in Africa, genetic diversity is the greatest in the world, and certain blood phenotypes are only found in people of African (mainly sub-Saharan African) or Caribbean origin. The rarity of this blood is based on the rhesus factor, but also on the genetic characteristics of the red blood cells. In France, a blood group is said to be “rare” when fewer than four out of every 1,000 people in the population have it, and there are no other compatible blood groups available to transfuse patients. The need for this unique blood cannot be met by the rest of the population, with the exception of blood from universal donors.

The participation of people from Africa and the Caribbean in blood donation is essential for the Etablissement Français du Sang (EFS) to help the sick, the seriously injured and people with specific diseases such as sickle cell anemia (Box 1).

Despite the multiplication of communication campaigns to increase blood donation, this population remains under-represented as “blood donors” in France. For Chieron et al. (2016), communication campaigns do not take into account the specificities related to blood donation from this population and ethnic minorities may have barriers and motivations that are specific to them (Bednall et al., 2013). When these are not considered, the effectiveness of communication can be limited. In multicultural countries particularly, communication may be effective with the majority population, but less effective with ethnic minorities. For these purposes, the Etablissement Français du Sang is looking into the possibility of adapting its communication campaigns to minority groups.

Adapting communication to the Afro-Caribbean population is important for several reasons: 1) to diversify the donor pool (Caucasian and Afro-Caribbean donors); 2) to increase the blood donation rate among Afro-Caribbeans; 3) to address the specific needs of this population.