

Best use of communication management: public sector

Kantar Media

Publication Approved

AGENCE DE LA BIOMÉDECINE

GENETIC TESTS

OBJECTIVE/BRIEF

The Agence de la Biomédecine (Biomedicine agency) in France is the public reference authority for all medical, scientific and ethical aspects relating to human genetics in France. The aim of the agency is to contribute to improvements in terms of the management of medical assistance in procreation, prenatal testing and genetic testing for medical purposes. It also **plays a role in ethical discussion and in raising awareness and understanding of ethical principles in activities of relevance to this specialist field.** It must also **make an effective contribution to legislation** and public healthcare policy.

Following the 2009 Bio Ethics Convention and its public discussions, and then the Leonetti report at the start of 2010 (draftsmen's proposals for the parliamentary commission review of bio ethical laws), the agency has made its main objective **to improve its knowledge of the human genetics discussion.** **It aims to achieve this through an evaluation of media sources in order to address the theme over a long period of time (21 months of debate) and to**

assess the position and influence of participants (healthcare professionals, politicians, religious leaders) who are both in favour and opposed to genetic testing.

STRATEGY

A robust **qualitative 3-step approach** (over 8 weeks)

I. A pre-analysis of the subject using technical documents provided by the agency

II. A **semi authorized sampling of media content by semantic processing software**, designed to follow three rules: **representation, homogeneity and relevance**. It will be possible to generalize the results obtained from this sample for all media coverage.

As a means of managing the complexity of the subject and the significant number of articles in the written and online press, a feature of the **semantic software SINEQUA's** sampling strategy has been designed to form a corpus relevant to the lexical and semantic field of genetic testing (diagnostic, detection, DPN¹, DPI², test). The volume has been limited to **1 000 articles** from a total base of 3 000 articles. Mere mentions in limited readership materials (local and professional press) have been disregarded, as have articles which have been produced in duplicate in both a web and page version on the same date (in this instance, only the paper version has been analysed).

¹ In utero testing

² In vitro testing

III. Content analysis on two levels: journalist coverage and participant coverage. This analysis is based round core subjects: **pre natal testing** (DPI, DPN) and postnatal testing (medical tests, freely available genetic tests). There is an open list of participants and there is a gradual and correlative classification of issues which enable the structure to demonstrate speech structure. It will be categorized by opinion (favourable and unfavourable) on each core subject.

EXECUTION/IMPLEMENTATION

The analysis deals with a chronological time period of **21 months from 2009 to 2010** and has been carried out in November and December of 2010 by a team of 3 people (1 consultant and 2 media analysts).

The code list evaluates the complexity of the media debate through the statistical **data of features which are characteristic of the content.**

- The frequency with which core subjects (pre natal testing, testing after birth) and participants appear.
- The editorial impact balanced for a target audience aged 15 and over.
- The main co-occurrences between participants.
- The frequency of favourable and unfavourable opinions.
- The impact of external events on the debate (such as CCNE³ recommendation)

Processing results and their **interpretation** demonstrate:

³Comité Consultatif National d’Ethique (National Ethics Committee)

- The diversity of arguments, discriminatory aspects and the level of input from participants both in favour and opposed to subjects, in terms of the role played by membership organisations (church, charities, doctors, etc.)
- Participants' weaknesses in communication or conversely particular strengths.
- The **potential correlation** between the media and corporate and legislative news (the authorization of the sale of freely available tests etc.)

A versatile and interactive review:

The presentation of results has centred on a **working group of healthcare professionals** (doctors, spokespeople) enabling a direct and thorough exchange of information.

This budget has been renewed for 2011.

CONCLUSIONS

The main insights demonstrated by this analysis are:

- Highlighting **media lobbying by church and theologians** particularly through local activity (conferences)
- Most people believe a **framework that is both conscientious and satisfactory** does exist in France for genetic practices but that there is a lack of input from politicians and leading figures on the subjects of pre natal diagnosis and also insufficient representation of doctor's viewpoints.

- **The consensus from all participants was unfavourable with regard to freely available genetic tests**, with call for the development of informed and educated coverage on the unreliability of such tests.
- **There is a feeling that the continued battle against Trisomy 21**, particularly noticeable in the coverage relating to DPI, in line with CCNE recommendations, is unjustified when research on treatments for Trisomy 21 is progressing.

This **study's impact** on the activity of the Agence de la Biomédecine is demonstrated by two concrete action plans: **action regarding healthcare professionals (understanding, change of attitude in communication) and action regarding public opinion (support of a survey of the general public).**

“This type of analysis is particularly useful for subjects which are new, developing and of divided opinion, such as genetics. Firstly it provides a means of demonstrating to healthcare professionals how their profession is represented in the media and from this to learn lessons which can be put into practice with immediate effect. The genetics study has been presented to the genetics working group consisting of healthcare professionals and has facilitated for the first time a discussion amongst these professionals regarding their relationship with the news and their needs on this subject matter. The analysis has been repeated this year so that it is possible to get an evolving picture of this subject in the media which can facilitate an appropriate discussion of the various aspects of genetics.”