

Crowdsourcing political ideology

Crowdsourcing is not a new concept in digital marketing circles, it is however getting a new lease on life in the world of politics, especially in Africa.

 By [Philani Mdingi](#) 14 Mar 2013

Wikipedia defines crowdsourcing as *the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, and especially from an online community, rather than from traditional employees or suppliers.*

The Kenyan based crowdsourcing platform, Ushahidi did a great job of informing the ordinary Kenyan citizen on violent hotspots after the 2007 Kenyan elections. The platform has since extended its functionality and has been used for other purposes like disaster area monitoring and information dissemination.

Ushahidi originally sent notifications via SMS, but now also includes email notifications. That's a smart move considering that most mobile users have access to email. Kenyan politicians are also fervently using the social media mill to chart out their agenda, more so than in previous elections in 2007. You only have to search for the hashtag [#kedebate2013](#) to see how they have employed twitter to clarify their ideology.

Technology to monitor elections

We have seen many instances where technology has been used to monitor elections and solicit feedback from citizens in countries like Ghana and Kenya, and few can deny the Twitter influence of the sometimes trigger happy South African and Western Cape premier, Helen Zille. African politicians have embraced Twitter in earnest, but what else are they doing?

Most interestingly there is a new breed of politician who is not only content with being a commentator on social media platforms, but wants to use technology to influence politics and social reform. Obama did it well, email and social media played critical roles in the process of moving his political agenda throughout the 2008 campaign. Not only did he tweet up a storm, he built relationships with his constituency, donors and voters by sending email campaigns that had one underlying message, "Yes we can!".

Obama used email to engage the younger generation of Americans. No other presidential candidate in history raised as much funds as he did, and all this was underpinned by a unified digital communications strategy. It's political participation 2.0 style.

Now back to Africa, a very interesting case study is unravelling in South African politics. Enter Agang - and no, it's not "a gang" - it means "to build" in Pedi, an indigenous South African language. Agang has been described by its founder and political activist Mamphela Ramphele as a political platform with a view to create a political party. The function of Agang at this stage is to crowdsource ideas from ordinary citizens on how to better manage the country, government and its resources.

Taken to the internet

Agang has taken to the internet to raise resources for the soon to be established political party. Ordinary citizens can donate their time or money on the Agang website.

What is of real interest in this case is not that the political platform has a site, but how it's using its website, Facebook page and Twitter to enable citizens to determine the kind of government that they want.

How effective this form of crowdsourcing will be, only time to tell. One thing has become very clear though technology is influencing all spheres of our lives in Africa and will continue to do so in ways we can't even imagine yet.

ABOUT PHILANI MDINGI

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