There has been both a generational shift and a technology shift in the last years as what Akshay Khanna calls ‘unruly politics’ is emerging virtually and in reality. Horizontal, multilevel connections allow partially unplanned events to mushroom with spontaneous protests, mobbing and even viral politics making change happen. There are now millions of people engaged in all sorts of new political behaviour, which perhaps overtakes the old organizations – the NGOs, trade unions and organized social movements – in the wake of huge mobilizations that could never have been imagined even five years ago. (Harcourt, 2012: 2)

During the last few decades, advances in information and communication technologies have shifted most things in daily life, at least in the global north. As discussed in the previous chapter, such technologies have acted as an enabler to increased communication and networking between not only individuals but also organisations. Terms and events such as the ‘Twitter Revolutions’ of Iran in 2009 and Egypt in early 2011, the use of ICTs in elections and governance, such as e-gov, and the rise of Online Campaigning Organisations, such as Avaaz and MoveOn, are all challenging the ways that politics is happening in most corners of the globe.

Specifically, since the early 2000s, the second generation of web technologies have become embedded into the everyday lives of people in both the global north as well as the global south. Shifts in the actual and potential utility of the interactiveness of information and communication technologies make them more compelling and transformative. The interactivity is created by the ways that platforms have been designed in order to make information and user-generated content easy to share.
and distribute. The interactive communication capability has meant that individuals can now not only create content, but that the movement of information is no longer monodirectional from organisation (such as INGOs) to supporter; supporters can now also comment and load content online. The digital landscape provides both an information source and a platform for expression for its users. Having a variety of internet-enabled devices at their disposal, users can generate and upload content to various platforms, extend their social networks, voice their views and opinions, and even interact and protest in virtual worlds.

With respect to INGOs, the new digital spaces that have been created by such technologies and the ways that INGOs are negotiating and utilising these spaces in order to engage, advocate and facilitate activism amongst northern publics is worth exploring. This chapter aims to provide insights into the following: the various platforms used by INGOs; the ways in which INGOs use digital spaces in their fundraising, engagement, advocacy and activism work; and the enablement of new types of technologically assisted social justice organisations, such as Online Campaigning Organisations (OCOs), to emerge.

Digital spaces

It is well documented that the internet has enabled transnational advocacy, and has become a key tool for social movement organisers to mobilise and communicate with supporters regarding demonstrations and political actions. But many perspectives on the effects of these technology shifts on the politics of change exist. This section will explore two very different perspectives, broadly categorised as the cyberenthusiasts and the cybercritics. The ways that technology and space interact will then be re-examined, picking up on the idea of ‘creating’ or ‘opening up’ space discussed in Chapter 2. These political spaces, enabled by technological shifts, could also be enabling what Habermas (1989) called ‘deliberative’ politics, spaces where dialogue and multi-directional discussions take place.

There are many debates revolving around the intersection of digital technologies and political action. Cybersceptics such as Gladwell (2010) claimed that the ‘revolution will not be tweeted’ and argued that a technological determinism, the assumption that technology drives a society’s social structures, is influencing our perspectives on the role of technology. Other cybersceptics argue that digital technologies are having a marked effect on the way politics is carried out. One of Gladwell’s critiques involves the types of connections that are developed through