# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 11

List of Abbreviations 13

Introduction 15
  Case Study: the Italian referendum campaign against water privatization 19
  Connected Activism: loose interactions on social media and their possible effects on campaigning 21
  Methods to Investigate Large-Scale Campaigns: a challenging object of study 24
  Structure of the Book 26

1 Models of Online-Related Activism 29
  1.1 Online-Related Activism: key concepts 31
  1.2 Overlapping Plans: research on online phenomena and its complexity 37
  1.3 Recurring Questions 43
  Conclusions 47

2 Methods for Investigating Online-Related, Large-Scale Campaigns on the Web 49
  2.1 The Italian Referendum Campaign on Water: methodological opportunities and difficulties 52
  2.2 Online-Related Social Research: some inspiring methods 59
  2.3 A Methodological Proposal for Investigating Large-Scale Online Campaigns 65

3 Water Commons 71
  Global movements and the Italian campaign against water privatization 74
  3.1 The Global Context 74
  3.2 *Acqua Bene Comune*: the growth of the Italian water coalition 82
  3.3 The 2011 Referendum Campaign against Water Privatization in Italy 90
  3.4 Alliances and Conflicts during the Campaign 98
  Conclusions 105
4 The Web of Water 107
   A trace on the links structure
   4.1 Investigating the Web as a Network of Links 110
   4.2 Network Analysis of the Water Campaign on the Web 114
   4.3 Community Structures and the Content of Websites 130
   Conclusions 136

5 Patterns of Online Communication during the Referendum Campaign 139
   5.1 Online Communication during the Campaign: an evolving strategy 142
   5.2 The Role of the Specialists: technological and communications skills 149
   5.3 The Media Context: the relationship with non-digital media 155
   5.4 Processes of Website Creation 159
   Conclusions 162

6 The Campaign for Water on Facebook 165
   Perceptions and organizational models in a real-digital space of activism
   6.1 How to Investigate a Facebook Campaign 169
   6.2 Activism on Facebook during the 2011 Referendum Campaign 176
   6.3 Groups, Initiatives, and Patterns of Use 181
   6.4 The Perception of Facebook 193
   Conclusions 201

7 Reinterpreting the Data 203
   New theoretical perspectives and methodological proposals
   7.1 Three Final Perspectives for Observing the Referendum Campaign 204
   7.2 On Methods: strengths and weaknesses of a combined methodological approach 214
   7.3 Five Directions for Further Research 219

List of the Interviews 223

References 227

Index 239
List of Figures and Tables

**Figures**

Figure 1.1 Recurrent research designs applied to the study of online activism 39
Figure 3.1 Frequency of the terms [acqua bene comune] and [privatizzazione acqua] in Google Trends 92
Figure 4.1 Web domain of the Italian referendum on water privatization 118
Figure 4.2 Out-degree at the periphery of the Web domain of the Italian referendum on water privatization 122
Figure 4.3 Web referendum on the web Network between the 7 websites with the highest in-degree 126
Figure 4.4 Ego networks of four relevant sites in the web domain of the 2011 Italian water referendum 129
Figure 4.5 Web domain of the referendum against water privatization, Italy 2011 132
Figure 4.6 Presence and absence of the keyword ‘bene comune’ (common good) in the web domain of the Italian referendum against water privatization 136
Figure 6.1 Two of the main profile pictures that the sympathisers adopted during the referendum campaign 187
Figure 6.2 ‘Vendesi Mamma’ initiative 188
Figure 6.3 Rome, 13th June 2011. Tens of sawed blue flags represent the water referendum committee 189
Figure 7.1 1st Model of online/offline interactions 211
Figure 7.2 2nd Model of online/offline interactions 211
Figure 7.3 3rd Model of online/offline interactions. Sub-models A & B 212
Figure 7.4 4th Model of online/offline interactions 213

**Tables**

Table 4.1 Categories of actors in the 2011 water referendum network 116
Table 4.2 Average centrality indexes for water-related and generic actors, with and without the network core 121
Table 4.3 The core of the web domain of the water referendum 124
Table 4.4 Comparison of the presence of keywords in Community A (core of the network) and in the rest of the web domain 135
Table 6.1  Referendum-related actors connected with my Facebook account during the campaign (events excluded)  
Table 7.1  Set of communication strategies elaborated by a single organization