

I-Mussolini: a Political or an Educational Tool?

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The most downloaded application in Italy right now, I-Mussolini, a collection of his speeches, causes debates and controversies all over the world.

iTunes launched a new iPhone application on January 21 called iMussolini which allows users to download audio, video and text, including speeches of Italy's infamous Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. The application has gained intense popularity over the past week and a half, surpassing other genres of iTunes media downloaded by Italians. More than 1,000 downloads a day have been registered, and iMussolini has become AppleStore Italy's bestseller.

The launching of the application seems to have come at a sensitive and inopportune moment. On January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day was celebrated, thus critical attention was drawn to the new iMussolini app sweeping across Italy, a country that suffered the loss of thousands of victims during the Holocaust.

Luigi Marino, a young entrepreneur from Naples, said that he created this application without the intention of glamorizing the legacy of Mussolini; he intended it to be a "history-related application" that "does not celebrate Fascism."

Marino declares that he doesn't represent any political party; he was just interested in computer programming and he didn't expect to cause such a sensation. The application offers more than a 100 integral speeches and 20 audio and video files.

Regardless of the intentions of the creator, who officially rejects all the extremist comments and



invites not to download it for the “wrong” reasons, this idea backfired on Marino, who found himself at the center of an International debate.

In fact, although the application can be considered educational, as it offers primary sources of some of the most important moments in Italian WWII history, people are speaking out against it. Elan Steinberg, VP of the US-based American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors and their descendents said the app is “an insult to the memory of all victims of Nazism and fascism, Jew and non-Jew, and should be condemned for its offence to decency and conscience”.

Alessandra Mussolini, a current politician and the granddaughter of Benito Mussolini, spoke about the app in regard to how it can impact the youth of Italy who may or may not know the hard facts and truth about the history of their own country. “Like it or not, the speeches and footage did occur, and with the app, this media is available to the new generation of iPod users who can easily download the app and interpret its content in a variety of ways. “

Censorship of the app may not be the best option, however. Davide Romano, on behalf of the association Amici di Israele (Friends of Israel). He said: “The fact that I-Mussolini is the most sold application in Italy really saddens me; even more when you realize that there are people making money out of it. This is obviously shocking and I strongly believe we need to condemn the creators of such programs. That being said, I don’t think it’s right to put a law into effect that blocks the application.”

In a democratic country such as Italy, trying to censor this controversial app might be as harmful as trying to pretend Mussolini did not impact Italy's history as much as he did.

i-Mussolini might be just a fad; even the creator admits that most of the people that are downloading it are doing it because of the general buzz, out of the simple curiosity this controversy has stirred.

The internet and the I-phone technology add a visibility and an immediate visceral response that this same material in other contexts wouldn’t have generated. It seems strange that material that is very serious, long and complex would even be so popular and considered “exciting” and hip.

Young people exchange content over the web easily, look at things quickly without researching or backing them up. These same speeches in a book or a documentary would have been contextualized more or would require intellectual effort and analysis. In the open wilderness of the web, the media on i-Mussolini can just be used as “fan pages”, pictures to show off at school or slogans to be learnt without too much thought and then made into new ideologies.

Apple’s responsibility is to be considered as well, if not also questioned as many critics of the application have done.

In the age of viral videos the real questions are: how fast will it spread? How long will this “trend” last? Is this a sign of a shift in political opinions in reality or just a virtual obsession?

This story raises many doubts and controversies that are hard to reduce to simple clear point of views, and hopefully historic public domain can be analyzed in depth in order to see the issue in the right context.

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