

Know Where the Crowds Are With the New CrowdMeter App

The Human Computation Institute (HCI) released CrowdMeter, an app developed in Ithaca to make informed choices about where to go. There, users can easily check how crowded a place is before they go and compare between different grocery stores, restaurants, or coffee shops with a simple click.

ITHACA, NY: A new [app](#) offers Ithacans a simple way to see how crowded their favorite coffee shop is before they head out. The Human Computation Institute developed CrowdMeter, an app that could help Ithacans reduce their exposure to viruses by choosing quieter times or less busy places to run their errands.

CrowdMeter, now available on [iOS](#) and [Android](#), displays a map of Ithaca's venues, each with an indicator to help you easily identify how crowded it is. Just like the colors of traffic lights, if the place is green, then you are good to go. Yellow indicates it is getting crowded and, if it is red, users may want to stop and look for another option. Not only does it convey the current crowdedness but there is also a feature to predict how crowded it will be by the arrival time, given the user's expected travel time.

By using the app to avoid crowds, people can make informed choices about where to shop or dine, so they will be more evenly distributed across venues and shopping times, reducing transmission opportunities for viruses such as COVID-19 and Influenza.

According to HCI director Dr. Pietro Michelucci, "the goal was to find a way to respond to the COVID crisis that is consistent with the American ideals of freedom and autonomy. For example, if you want to grab a cup of joe, you can compare which coffee shop is less crowded, go straight there, and get it faster." Michelucci believed a win-win could be achieved by empowering people with information that leads to actions that benefit everyone.

According to HCI's simulations, even with 10% of Ithacans using CrowdMeter, there could be a measurable reduction in overall exposure rates".

An app made in Ithaca, for Ithacans

CrowdMeter is being piloted in Ithaca to gather user feedback before scaling it to include other cities. The goal is to improve user experience, assess the app's live crowdedness estimates, and get a sense of its potential impact on reducing virus transmission.

[Initial research](#) into the potential impacts of CrowdMeter was conducted in collaboration with researchers from Harvard University, ETH Zurich, Microsoft Research and Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine.

About Human Computation Institute

Human Computation Institute (HCI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to advancing the science of crowd-powered systems for the betterment of humanity. More information: hcinst.org.

The CrowdMeter project has received generous support from Microsoft and the Aspen Institute, where HCI was a *COVID-19 Challenge Grant* winner.

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