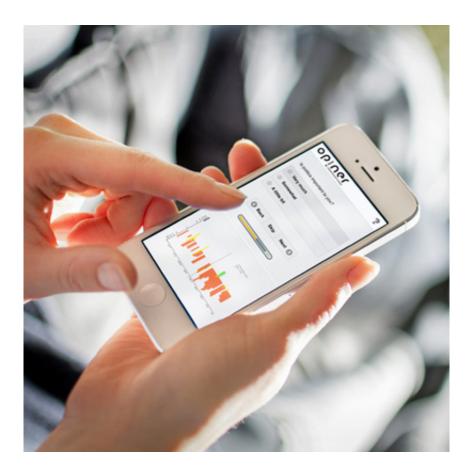# A mobile app for conducting opinion polls

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Opiner is an open source tool for opinion polling.

Soon anyone can conduct public opinion polls to drive issues that are important to them, using a new open source tool being developed at Sweden's KTH Royal Institute of Technology.

Researcher Konrad Tollmar and his colleagues intend for the mobile

app, Opiner, to be used as a tool for direct democracy. Tollmar says that once Opiner is publicly available, it will enable anyone to conduct surveys, drive public opinion and influence political decisions.

"This will be an alternative to services that can cost millions to use," says Tollmar. "It gives people an opportunity that historically only large organisations have had."

Public opinion polls are an important tool for interest groups, which regularly hire commercial firms to conduct polls for them. The ability to take stock of – and present – public opinion enables interest groups to control the narrative around their issues, establish their communications themes and influence how the media and policymakers grasp a given subject.

"Polling can be expensive," he says. "But Opiner enables anyone to drive public opinion or conduct surveys."

Opiner could also have the benefit of energising more people to become politically involved. And it's not just for activists. Media organisations big and small can use the tool for their own purposes.

"We're working on a form of direct democracy. That people can have a voice in society," he says.

"But Opiner can be used for just about anything, large or small," he says, noting that one of the strengths of Opiner is that it can be context-specific.

Targeting mobile devices means that Opiner pollsters can make use of both space and time to find out what people think, and ask relevant questions based on these two parameters. For example, what do people think about public transportation when they are riding on the subway?

What do students think about the quality of lunch while they're sitting in the school cafeteria?

"There is evidence in behavioral science and what is called "Experience Sampling", that surveys get a more true result when people are asked what they think in the moment, instead of afterward," he says.

Opiner also offers transparency. In addition to implementing polls, users can analyse the performance and freely share it. The system includes a toolkit to easily visualise the results in an understandable way.

"There are a lot of great tools on the web for public polling, but they are closed and commercial. Opiner is fully open and works on all types of newer phones. The system is open source, so anyone can download the software and set up their own Opiner," he says.

But it's not just the political benefit that Tollmar hopes to spread. In beta tests with teachers and students, the research team found that the act of surveying itself serves an educational purpose: as a way of developing students understanding of politics and language.

"First, we talked with their teachers about which questions should be asked. That worked so-so," he says. "The students didn't think the questions were always relevant. It was much better when the students themselves had to formulate their questions."

Opiner is part of the European research project, FlashPoll. Flashpoll has a mature Android app available, but what makes Opiner stand-out, Tollmar says, is its truly open platform – from the establishment of questions, running the polls and analysis, to the sharing of results. "You should rather see Opiner as a research prototype of the next generation of Flashpoll tools," he says.

Tollmar is among a group of researchers at KTH who have worked with various digital tools over the last several years to help people make their voices heard, including Måns Wrange, Patrik Hernwall, Igor Isaksson och Mats Gustavsson.

Provided by KTH Royal Institute of Technology