Research Article

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A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF CMT AND EASYCHAIR FOR ACADEMIC CONFERENCE MANAGEMENT: USABILITY, FEATURES, AND USER SATISFACTION

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Abstract: Conference management systems are critical to the efficient submission, reviewing, and decision-making process in academic conferences. Among the popular systems, Microsoft's Conference Management Toolkit (CMT) and EasyChair are two widely used tools that assist conference organizers, reviewers, and authors. This research presents a comparative analysis of CMT and EasyChair along three important dimensions: usability, feature set, and user satisfaction. Both systems were evaluated by formal questionnaires and interviews of authors, reviewers, and conference organizers who have used both systems for real settings. Strengths and weaknesses in interface, reviewer assignment, submission workflow, and communication efficiency are revealed by the analysis. Both systems are functionally adequate, although CMT has a cleaner interface than EasyChair, which is also more flexible and customizable. Satisfaction differed by role and task complexity, and organizers preferred CMT for administrative ease while reviewers preferred the review management capabilities of EasyChair. The findings provide practical insights for conference committees choosing management software and informing them of broader discussion on how to enhance digital platforms for the organization of academic events.

Keywords: CMT, EasyChair, Comparison, Digital Platforms, Feature, Recommendations.

Introduction: Academic conferences provide special venues for research communication, collaboration, and dissemination of research. Robust digital solutions to organize submissions, peer reviewing, communication, and scheduling require their management. Conference management systems (CMS) have, over the last few years, emerged as an absolute requirement to automate such elaborate processes.

The popular CMS systems, Microsoft's Conference Management Toolkit (CMT) and EasyChair are two of the most well-known systems in many disciplines. They both provide web-based configurations that provide support for various operations such as paper submission, reviewer assignment, decision-making, and final proceedings administration. While both possess identical functionality, CMT and EasyChair differ from each other in user interface design, automation of workflow, customization, and overall experience.

The choice of conference management software can have a direct effect on the productivity of the conference organizing team, the integrity of peer review, and the satisfaction of authors and reviewers. There is, though, relatively little scholarly literature that compares these two systems as viewed from the most important stakeholders' perspectives: conference organizers, reviewers, and authors.

Though both EasyChair and CMT are well-established, each adheres to a different design philosophy. CMT, which was developed by Microsoft Research, emphasizes scalability and is generally used for large, international conferences,

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especially computer science and engineering conferences. EasyChair, on the other hand, is preferred for being affordable and the first choice for small or nascent conferences in a wide range of fields. These context-dependent disparities in adoption underscore the need not to just assess technical usability but also the overall congruence of the system with conference size, discipline, and organizational requirements.

Furthermore, since the number of scholarly events continues to expand and electronic workflows more and more are wanted to be seamless, conference organizers face greater pressure to provide the best platform choices that maximize efficiency, equity, and satisfaction. Submission quality, review equity, and event reputation are all vulnerable to usability deficiencies, functional inadequacies, or the lack of proper customizations. Based on a comparative examination of CMT and EasyChair, this research catalogues the hard facts of usability-functionality trade-offs with empirical support for well-informed decision-making in academic conference management.

This research attempts to fill this gap by proposing a comparative study of EasyChair and CMT using three significant parameters: usability, feature effectiveness, and customer satisfaction. Through surveys and interviews of the expert user base of the two systems, the research examines how the two systems allow or hinder different roles in the research conference process. The results of this research inform both future platform selection by scholarly communities and affect and inform digital scholarly event management platforms.

Literature Review: More extensive use of web-based systems for conference management has created a growing need to evaluate conference management systems (CMS). These systems play a critical role in automating and streamlining essential tasks such as paper submission, reviewer assignment, communication, and notification of decisions. Well-designed CMS tools can significantly reduce the administrative workload of conference organizers while ensuring that the process remains manageable for reviewers and authors.

Prior studies have focused on various dimensions of CMS platforms. Arya et al. [1] examined open-source conference management tools and emphasized the importance of modularity, scalability, and customization. Similarly, Wang and Chen [3] investigated usability issues in academic digital tools and found that user satisfaction is closely tied to intuitive navigation, efficient reviewer-assignment workflows, and real-time communication features.

EasyChair [5], introduced in the early 2000s, has become one of the most widely used CMS platforms due to its free basic version and high configurability. It is particularly valued for its flexibility in managing multi-track events, though its interface has been criticized as outdated and occasionally complex to navigate, as highlighted by Patel and Mehta [2]. In contrast, Microsoft's Conference Management Toolkit (CMT) [4] has gained traction, especially in engineering and computer science communities, because of its modern interface, structured workflow support, and strong capacity for managing bulk submissions.

Despite the prominence of both platforms, comparative evaluations of CMT and EasyChair remain limited. Existing comparisons are often anecdotal, relying on blogs or informal reviews rather than systematic empirical analysis. Comprehensive studies examining these systems from the perspectives of key user roles—conference organizers, reviewers, and authors—are notably scarce. This study addresses this gap by conducting a structured comparison of CMT and EasyChair, focusing on usability, feature support, and role-based satisfaction. The results aim to offer practical guidance for conference committees and software developers seeking to enhance future CMS designs.

Methodology

Research Design: This study employs a comparative, mixed-methods approach to evaluate the usability, feature set, and user satisfaction of two widely used conference management systems are EasyChair and Microsoft CMT. The design combines quantitative survey results with qualitative interview results to obtain a balanced view of user experiences across different roles.

Participants: Members were selected based on their experience using at least one of the platforms, EasyChair or CMT during the past three years as conference organizers (admins), reviewers, or authors. The research included 60 participants who constituted shown in the following table 1 and figure 1.

Table 1. Number of participants

Participants	Number of participants
Conference organizers	10
Reviewers	25
Authors	25
Total	60

Figure 1. The ratio of participants

This ratio reflects the actual distribution of roles in typical conference settings, where organizers are few and authors/reviewers are more numerous.

Data Collection: In this study, there are two primary methods used to collect data shows in the following figure 2. They are online surveys and semi-structured interviews.
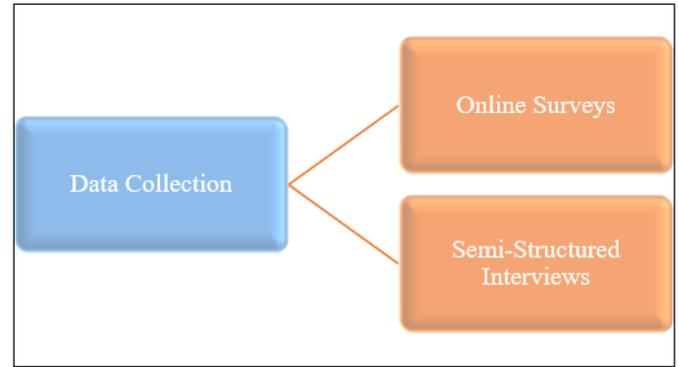

Figure 2. Data collection methods

In the Online Surveys, structured questionnaires were distributed to all participants. The survey included both Likert-scale and open-ended questions covering the system's usability (e.g., ease of navigation, responsiveness), feature availability and usefulness, user satisfaction by task (e.g., submission, review, scheduling) and comparative preferences (if participants used both systems). For Semi-Structured Interviews, a subset of 10 participants (3 organizers, 4 reviewers, 3 authors) participated in follow-up interviews to explore their experiences in more depth. These interviews focused on usability challenges, decision-making processes, and suggestions for improvement.

Evaluation Criteria: The comparison of CMT and EasyChair was based on the following evaluation dimensions. Usability which includes interface design, ease of learning, task flow. Features include range, relevance, and efficiency of core functionalities (submission, review, communication, decision-making) and user satisfaction include overall experience, perceived reliability, willingness to recommend or reuse.

Data Analysis: In the data analysis, the quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) to compare user ratings across platforms and roles. The qualitative responses from open-ended survey questions and interviews were thematically coded to identify common patterns, platform-specific issues, and user preferences.

Experimental Results

Overview of Participants: A total of 60 participants completed the survey, 10 conference organizers, 25 reviewers and 25 authors. Among them, 70% had experience with both platforms, while the remaining 30% used either CMT or EasyChair exclusively.

Usability Comparison: Participants rated usability on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very poor, 5 = excellent) shown in the following table 2, figure 2 and figure 3 show the distribution and variation of scores between the two platforms.

Table 2. Usability comparison

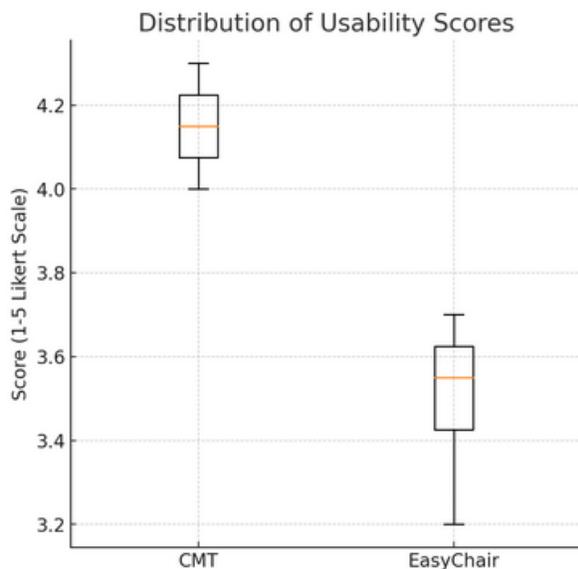| Usability Metric	CMT (Avg. Score)	EasyChair (Avg. Score)
Interface clarity	4.3	3.6
Ease of navigation	4.1	3.5
Learning curve	4.0	3.2
Responsiveness/load speed	4.2	3.7

Figure 3. The distribution and variation of scores between the two platforms.

The boxplot in Figure 3 reinforces this observation by illustrating the tighter clustering of CMT scores compared to EasyChair. While both platforms showed relatively high usability, CMT's consistently stronger performance implies that it provides smoother user experience with fewer usability challenges.
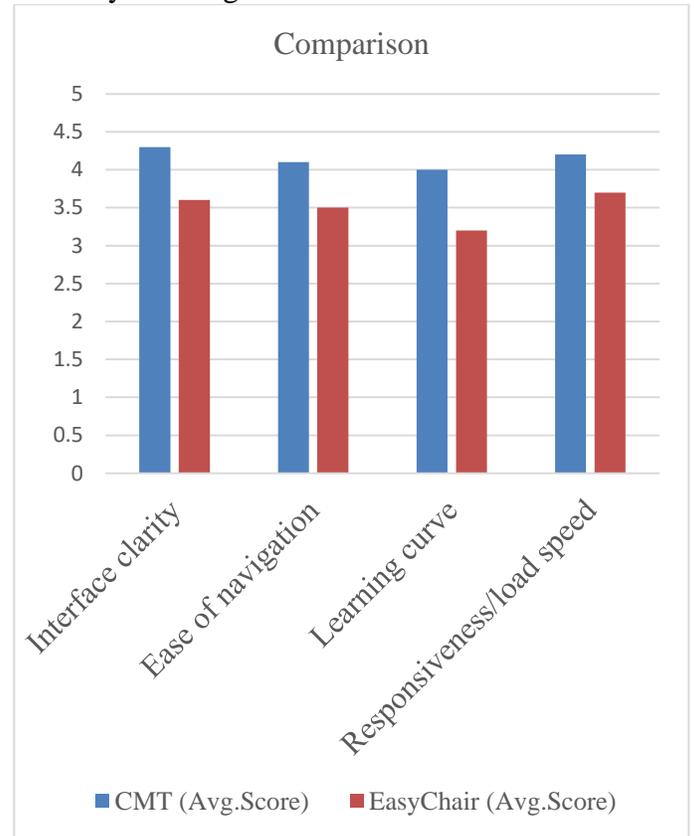

Figure 4. Usability comparison

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Usability Scores

Metric	CMT	EasyChair
Mean	4.15	3.50
Median	4.15	3.55
Standard Deviation	0.13	0.22
Minimum	4.00	3.20
Maximum	4.30	3.70

The results indicate that CMT consistently outperforms EasyChair in terms of usability. CMT's higher mean (4.15 vs 3.50) and lower standard deviation (0.13 vs 0.22) suggest participants perceived it as more user-friendly and reliable, with less variation in ratings.

The comparative usability analysis of CMT and EasyChair, based on participant survey responses, is summarized in table 2 and figure 3, 4 and 5. Across all four usability dimensions interface clarity, ease

of navigation, learning curve, and responsiveness CMT consistently achieved higher average scores compared to EasyChair. For example, CMT scored 4.3 in interface clarity, whereas EasyChair received 3.6. Similarly, in terms of responsiveness, CMT was rated at 4.2, surpassing EasyChair's 3.7.
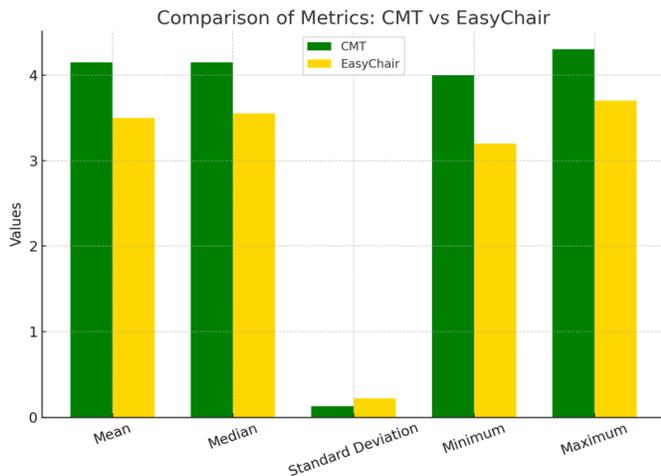

Figure 5. Comparison of metrics for CMT and EasyChair

The descriptive statistics in Table 3 confirm more of these differences. The mean usability score across the CMT roles was 4.15, as against a mean of 3.50 for EasyChair. Further, CMT also showed a lower standard deviation (0.13) compared to EasyChair (0.22), which is an indication that user perceptions of CMT were more consistent and homogeneous. EasyChair, as against this, showed greater variability in response, suggesting that user experiences were less homogeneous between roles and tasks.

These findings suggest that reviewers, authors, and conference organizers felt CMT was more intuitive and reliable for conference management tasks than EasyChair. The higher usability ratings for CMT are likely the result of its more transparent interface design, easier task flow, and better responsiveness. EasyChair, while serviceable, likely has a higher learning curve and has higher variability in user satisfaction.

Findings and Discussions: The results of this research reveal striking differences in user experiences and interactions with Microsoft CMT and EasyChair, among the top conference management systems. In spite of the fact that the two systems may carry through the entire process of a conference, they are excellent in their special functionality and vary by user roles.

Learning Curve and Usability: CMT always had superior usability scores, particularly from authors and chairs. Its minimalist, modern appearance and streamlined workflows are easier for new users to learn. Users noted that CMT is more responsive and less cluttered on mobile devices. EasyChair's face was more "function-rich but visually outdated" and may be the reason why it has a more challenging learning curve. But power users appreciated EasyChair's functionality richness despite its less modern appearance.

Role-Based Feature Preferences: The survey shows a clear divergence in feature preference by user role. Organizers preferred CMT for its automated tools, embedded email templates, and streamlined submission handling, which reduced their administrative workload. Reviewers preferred EasyChair due to its highly customizable review forms and simplicity in supporting multiple review assignments. Authors valued CMT for how intuitive its submission interface was but also the reliability and convenience of EasyChair in tracking submission status.

These findings point out that while CMT is optimized for administrative optimality, EasyChair is accommodating to the benefit of academic reviewers working across different domains and formats.

User Satisfaction and Adaptability: System overall satisfaction was high for both, although CMT had the edge in terms of organizers. The greatest strength of EasyChair was flexibility, particularly in the case of conferences that had non-standard procedures or those that required multi-track and multi-phase implementations. Sometimes this flexibility came at the cost of simplicity. Some users unexpectedly desired a hybrid system that took the ease of use of CMT and blended it with EasyChair's sophisticated configuration ability.

For conference committees deciding between platforms, the findings suggest the following. Use CMT for large-scale, formal conferences with many submissions, tight deadlines, and numerous tasks. Use EasyChair for small, interdisciplinary, or customizable events where flexibility is most important and experienced technical users are available.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion: This paper conducted a comparative usability study of Microsoft CMT and EasyChair in terms of their usability, key features, and user satisfaction by the key stakeholders: authors, reviewers, and conference organizers. The findings reveal that while both systems cover the core functionality needs of scholarly conference management, they significantly differ in user experience and functionality priorities.

CMT stands out for its modern interface and structured workflows, making it especially suitable for conference organizers who must handle large submissions. EasyChair, on the other hand, is more adaptable to a finer level and is preferred by reviewers because of its flexible review management. Both systems have comparatively high user satisfaction, but to varying degrees depending on role and experience with the system. The study substantiates the fact that there is no one superior system. Instead, the optimal choice differs based on the size, intricacy, and technological requirements of the event involved.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, the recommendations presented in Table 4 are proposed in this research.

Table 4. Recommendations

For Conference Organizers	Choose CMT if the conference involves many submissions and requires automated workflows, structured review phases, and clear communication tools.
	Opt for EasyChair if the conference format is non-traditional, interdisciplinary, or if greater flexibility in review forms and track configuration is needed.
For Platform Developers	CMT could benefit from improved configurability and reviewer dashboard enhancements to better support complex review assignments.
	EasyChair should consider modernizing its interface and improving its usability, particularly for first-time users and authors.
For Future Researchers	Further studies could explore the integration of AI-driven features (e.g., automatic reviewer suggestions, conflict detection) in CMS tools.
	A broader comparative study involving additional platforms (e.g., Ex Ordo, OpenConf, Indico) would deepen the understanding of the evolving CMS landscape.

Author Contribution: Hlaing Htake Khaung Tin was accountable for the study proposal, data interpretation, manuscript writing, data collection and analysis, and critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content. Both authors contributed equally, read, and approved the final manuscript.

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