# **User Experience Research Report**

## **Comparative Evaluation**

### **Team Visionaries**

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### **Executive Summary**

ProQuest ETD Administrator stands as a cornerstone in the academic landscape, facilitating the electronic submission process for theses and dissertations. Our team embarked on a comparative evaluation looking to enhance the user experience and refine platform functionality. Through detailed analysis, we aimed to find out how competitor sites measured up against ProQuest's system, identifying key features that influenced user satisfaction, while uncovering obstacles encountered during publishing.

Our research examined pivotal questions surrounding user satisfaction, navigation ease and instructional clarity during the publishing process. We scrutinized multiple competitor platforms, from digital publishers to academic associations. Notably, **Bepress emerged as the sole direct competitor**, aligning closely with ProQuest's functionality and target audience.

We did a detailed evaluation focussing on five important factors which were instructional clarity, audience, supplemental content, aesthetics, and interaction style. Important insights were gathered from our research, shedding light on ProQuest's strengths and areas for improvement. Interestingly, while ProQuest offers a step-by-step text guide, its competitors complemented this feature by providing a variety of resources including videos and formatting guides. While ProQuest targets students and academic institutions, competitors had larger audiences including libraries, researchers and faculty.

Furthermore, there was a consistent aesthetic across all platforms, projecting an academic atmosphere. However, ProQuest faced difficulties in providing transparent tracking of the review process. In response, recommendations were developed to address these concerns, advocating for the expansion of supplementary materials, clearer instructions through video tutorials, a broader user base and improved communication channels.

In summary, our comparative evaluation offers an understanding of ProQuest's standing in relation to its competitors, highlighting opportunities for improving the user experience and refining the platform. As we move forward, our commitment to improving academic publishing standards and meeting the evolving needs of users remains a key priority. This commitment ensures ProQuest's continued leadership in scholarly dissemination.

### Introduction

ProQuest ETD Administrator is a platform which facilitates the submission and publication of theses and dissertations for a wide range of students and institutions. The product's main goal is to streamline the submission process, offering users a straightforward path to publishing and ordering copies of their work. A majority of ProQuest's user base are graduate students looking to publish and disseminate theses or dissertations. Administrators are also relevant stakeholders. To make recommendations that could improve ProQuest's user experience, our team has evaluated its features and affordances against those of its most relevant comparators.

The primary objective of our research is to identify how ProQuest's aesthetics, clarity, and interaction style relate to the industry baseline. In this study, we aim to address the following key questions:

- Are there notable differences in interaction style and aesthetics between ProQuest and its comparators?
- How does the ease of navigation on ProQuest's site compare to that of its comparators?
- What is the industry standard for instructional content and how does it compare to that of ProQuest's system?

To thoroughly investigate these questions, we have compared ProQuest to products with similar goals, services, and audiences. Our findings serve to highlight ProQuest's strengths and weaknesses within the publishing market, specifically relating to clarity and ease of use.

### **Methods**

During our initial meeting, our client identified Bepress as a competitor with a similar audience and function to ProQuest. To find other relevant comparators, our team searched for platforms with comparable features, such as online publishers and associations affiliated with academic submissions (i.e. journals and magazines). Products offering the same function were identified as direct competitors, while noncompeting products with similar functions and audiences were considered parallel. We categorized platforms with different functions (e.g. journals like Nature and Plos One) as analogous. Given the limited number of direct comparators, we chose to focus on distinct services provided by ProQuest, e.g. ordering physical copies and submitting scholarly works, as criteria for identifying our comparators. Many of the products we

researched were identified through internet searches, though IEEE and ASME were both mentioned by a participant during user interviews. To evaluate the list of comparators we compiled, we looked at five specific criteria—audience, instructional clarity, supplemental content, aesthetics, and interaction style. We designed these criteria to measure ProQuest's user experience against that of its most relevant competitors, offering insight into ProQuest's strengths and weaknesses when compared to industry standards. We've summarized our list of comparators as follows.

### **Bepress**

A digital publishing platform that provides academic institutions, libraries, and researchers with the necessary tools to publish scholarly works, manage institutional repositories, etc.

### Elsevier

Dutch academic publishing company that specializes in scientific, medical, and technical content. Users are able to publish both books and journals.

#### **IEEE**

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers is an association allowing members to publish material relating to electronics and electrical engineering.

### **ASME**

The American Society of Mechanical Engineers publishes journals, eBooks, and conference proceedings related to engineering research.

### **Oxford Academic**

Oxford University Press's academic research platform, publishes scholarly journals, books, and multimedia submissions.

#### **Nature**

The world's leading multidisciplinary scientific journal which publishes peer-reviewed research, mainly in science and technology.

#### **Plos One**

An open access mega journal published by the Public Library of Science (PLOS). The journal covers primary research from any discipline within science and medicine.

#### **MIT Press**

A university press which has been a pioneer in the open access movement in academic publishing. Publishes a number of academic journals.

### **Sheridan Communications**

A company that provides digital printing and warehouse services for books, scholarly journals, and magazines.

To analyze our findings, we evaluated each comparison product against our criteria, highlighting key features and aspects in each category. We created a comparative

matrix via Google Sheets to compile our research in a single document (See Appendix). In addition to our five criteria, we included columns for comparator type, justification for comparison, and product function. Through the organization of our data, we were able to synthesize a set of key findings—taking into account the range of distinct comparators, we evaluated their overarching features and affordances against ProQuest's own. We've recorded the five most evident patterns within this report.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

As mentioned above, the sole direct comparator we identified through our research was Bepress, a digital publishing platform which also handles the submission of theses and dissertations. Other types of competitors, such as platforms that publish scholarly journals and magazines, can either be categorized as analogous or parallel comparators. After evaluating each criterion within our comparative matrix (See Appendix), we identified five pivotal insights and formulated five corresponding recommendations for each finding.

### **Findings**

### **Instructional Content**

- ProQuest offers a comprehensive step-by-step text guide embedded with
  external PDF links, while other competitors also provide various resources such
  as videos, checklists, editorial criteria, formatting guides, and submission
  FAQs to further assist users in the publishing process (See Appendix Criteria
  #1).
- 8/10 of the websites we evaluated provide clear submission **instructions**, with some also integrating **videos** accompanied by **slides** (See Appendix Criteria #2).
- ProQuest has a straightforward process of publishing, but focuses less than comparators such as Nature and Plos One on the reviewing process. (See Appendix Criteria #5)

#### **Aesthetics**

 ProQuest and its competitors all contain a clean, standard, and easy-to-navigate professional aesthetic, reflecting an authoritative and rigorous academic tone. (See Appendix #4)

### Audience

 ProQuest primarily targets academic institutions and students seeking to publish their theses and dissertations, whereas others may have a broad range of audiences including libraries, researchers, and faculty members, etc. (See Appendix Criteria #3).

#### Recommendations

#### **Instructional Content**

- Expanding supplemental content like **formatting guides** and providing additional **visual aids**, like pictures and videos to support the step-by-step guide.
- Implementing video tutorials complemented by slides to enhance the accessibility and clarity of submission instructions, giving users the opportunity to choose from multiple resources for guidance.
- Incorporating additional communication channels beyond email for authors, reviewers, and editors to facilitate smoother interactions and minimize delays in the publishing process.

#### **Aesthetics**

• Enhancing the clarity of text hierarchy by enlarging the font size of the title element while maintaining a highly conventional aesthetic.

### **Discussion**

The comparative evaluation conducted provides helpful insights into the user experience associated with the ProQuest ETD Administrator system and its positioning in the market relative to its competitors. However, there are some limitations and shortcomings to the breadth and depth of the study that need to be addressed.

### **Shortcomings**

- Limited scope of direct competitors: The comparative evaluation was somewhat constrained by the limited number of direct competitors, with Bepress being the only one identified as offering a similar service for the submission of dissertations and theses. This scarcity underscores a niche market but also limits the diversity of most relevant comparative data and potentially valuable insights that could be obtained from a broader competitive landscape. Meanwhile, selections are based on internet searches and clients' suggestions. We could not ignore the possibilities that these competitors may not represent the full spectrum of available or relevant platforms.
- Limited disciplines evaluated: The study primarily identified analogous and parallel competitors within the sciences, whereas ProQuest caters to a broad

- range of disciplines. This focus might have restricted the evaluation to science-specific publishing practices and potentially overlooked unique features and requirements regarding other disciplines that ProQuest serves.
- Limited criteria: Additionally, the evaluation criteria we built for examining
  focused primarily on instruction-related content and interaction styles. While
  these are significant, other aspects such as user support and post-submission
  services may also profoundly affect user satisfaction and could be included in
  future analyses.

### **Next Steps**

Although Bepress is currently the only direct competitor we have identified, there is scope for further research on websites that may have the potential to become the direct competitors in future development. This could involve extending the research internationally, or considering adjacent services that handle academic content management. Moreover, the evaluation criteria may be modified and updated after discussions with clients to better align with their needs. We plan to perform competitor analysis periodically to ensure that the evaluation reflects the most critical features and most current practices in the market. Future heuristic evaluation and usability testing could also possibly yield new perspectives on the aspects that require assessment.

# **Appendix**

### **Comparative Matrix**

### Link to Google Sheets:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/164yoc\_WRuTsd3bj3Vyk7ysWRQLw-AeUJaUsdHy2V Ro0/edit?usp=sharing

Comparators	Comparator type	Justification for comparison, comparator type definitions	Functions description	Criteria #1 (e.g. supplemental content)	Criteria #2 (e.g. instructional clarity)	Criteria #3 (e.g. audience)	Criteria #4 (e.g. sesthetics)	Criteria #5 (e.g. interaction style)
ProQuest (Sufyen)			ProCuest is designed to publish the electronic submission and management, process for Pieses and dissentations at academic institutions for students, administrators, and graduate schools.	thesis/dispertation. As a person goes through the steps.	ProQuest has a help tab on how to submit your thesis/disentation. They also have contact support where you can submit your lease or question as a case through a form.	ProQueet's audience consists mainly of academic institutions and, more granularly, students looking to publish their theseakdssertations.	ProGuest is simple for users to navigate through. They have no color confeats errors and the navigation tabs are easily accessible.	ProQuest has a straightforward and transparent submission process. Within each section, they have instructions on how to complete the reconsary lasks.
Bepress (Sufyan)	5 - Direct	Begress is ProQuest's main competitor as they have very similar tools for graduate students looking to publish their scholarly work.	Begress is a digital publishing platform that provides academic institutions, libraries, and researchers with a range of looks and services to discontinuate scholarly works, manage institutional repositories, and showcase academic achievements.	Baginasis has references and how to guides to help users with their thesis/discensation. They have different table for white user may have quasiform on such as San Administration. User have such published the such as the subject of the distribution, they have such published you cold and will all them you will subject uses on what to do all entry with daily individually potunes on what to do all entry with daily individually.	Begress has an entire section dedicated to help users with majority of their problems/supstice. Along with the section, they have an hour lieng visites for "Best Practices for Managing Electronic Theses & Dispersations" and they have a power-point side show in case users don't want to watch the full videa.	Bepress's sudernoe primerly consists of academic institutions, libestes, researchers, Soully members, and students seeking to publish their dissistintiation.	Segment has a simple, yet professional seathers, that is similar to ProCuest. Their design includes a dean nardor along with outsomer neviews and upcoming/recorded vectoriars.	Similar to ProQuest, administariors or students have to creatio an account in order to go through the process of publishing. The instructions show that the site has tools to get to the configuration page and resigning through it. They also bow bot procioces when making changes to their publication.
Elsevier (Kiry)	2 - Paratiel	Though Elsevier isn't a platform intended specifically for these idissertations, users are able to publish academic papers via a similar online submission process to ProQuest.	Dutch academic publishing company that specializes in scientific, medical, and technical content. Users are able to publish both books and journals.	Ellewier includes a step-by-step guide on how to publish pepers via their platform. Within their inteructions page, they link a quick guide pdf as well as an "understanding publishing" guide which explains publishing options.	Their graphics include simple, comprehensive instructions. Guides are available in multiple languages.	Researchers and healthcare professionals looking to disservinate publications relating to science and health.	Elsevier has a minimalist, modern aestheds, d Benefits of their design include increased readability and a fresh look.	Unlike ProQuest, authors navigate Elsevier's UI via multiple disconnected pages, this makes the process of publishing less straightforward and trackable.
IEEE (Kay)	1 - Analogous	IEEE Ian't directly competing with ProCusest as it is not an online platform for thesis discentation submission. The site above users to publish literature such as books and journal articles relating specifically to deatomics and directical engineering. IEEE was mentioned as a comparator by one of our interviewes.	IEEE or the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers is a professional association witch allows members to publish material relating to electronics and electrical engineering.	IEEE has three options on its publishing page — "Witing," "Peer Review." and "Publishing," Witties to writing subsection, it offers video tutorial guides for structuring your papers.	Users are directed to a short, comprehensive list of steps below entering the online submission portal.	IEEE's user base is limited to a specific discipline (electronics and electrical engineering).	IEEE's website has a simple but functional assistance. Large buttons offer increased readability and comprehension.	IEEE's main website is separate from its online journal/conference/bookingspatine submission portal. Though their submission portal is inaccessible without an account, the instruction guides provided by the main page allow the use to fully prepare their material before the submission process begins.
ASME - Catherine	1 - Analogous	ASME isn't the platform specialized on dissertation/thesis submission, but more leen to the service on publishing engineer research in journals and officels	ASME publishes innovative engineering research in journals, eBooks, and conference proceedings.	ASSME explained steps of publishing journals, and has effered several PDF link and Youtube Video for new authors to get started on the publishing	The instruction is listed as bullet point, it is easy to read and nevigation through	The intented user narrowed down to engineer researcher.	The page is prefly standard and well- structured. External links in the page are in a different color to be differentiate from other toots and are all underlined.	AMSE's submission page can be lead by the navigation sub-links, and it will be in a different system from the main page. When create the suffer page, the error message poped up was extremely technical and was not understandable.
Oxford Academic - Henry	1 - Analogous	ProQuest ETD Administrator is analogous to Oxford Academic in their roles as platforms for accessing academic certent. However, ProQuest focuses specificatly on theses and dissentiations, while Oxford Academic offers a broader range of sorbiarty referralins, including journals, books, and reference works from various publishers.	Oxford Academic serves as an online platform providing access to scholarly centent including journals and books across various disciplines. If functions as various disciplines, if functions as valueble resource for reasonathers, students, and educators seeking high- quality academic fenalisms from a reputable judishher.	Disford Academic has dealled articles on their website that explains how a proposal should be formatted step-by step.	Outland Assistance offers a "delivery checklist" detailing the stops to submission.	Oxford Academic's audience consists of researches, students and educators from various disciplines.	The Oxford Academic website is simple yet effective. Important links are given a different color to make them stand out.	Authors are directed to send their proposals disorily to their Oxford University Press elidinal contact which is opporate from Oxford According The address contact with its opporate from Oxford According to a professionary review. Once noviewed, the address is opportunitary review. Once noviewed, the address is contact will then send it to the Oxford According to partial years for final neview and if according to send up the press a production schedule and contact to reach out to.
Nature (d)	1 - Analogous	While Nature is not a platform for thesis or dissertation submission like ProQuest, it is analogous in its function as an outlet for academic publishing. The Socus of Nature is on the immediate presentation of new scientific knowledge and discourse.		Nature has a "For Authors" page that provides all informations needed for submission. All instructions are taled as bullet points.	The instruction on "For Authors" provides comprehensive information for users buffer submitting a contribution to Nature. However, this instruction is exempted principles in instruction is exempted principles. The submission system. Upon entering the submission portal, there are fewer instructions provided.		Natura's website has a contemporary and perfecsional accitycle that reflocit is standing in the scientific community. Although the website is mainly feed-based, it has recessary visual elements that highlight significant scientific advances and discoveries. The submission system in particular is many straightforward and implements a basic legicit. With standard forms, buttons, and test fields.	The content of the submission system occupies only the left half of the window, which is unassal and makes the interaction less includes. Additionally, Natura's bublin submission system Manuscola's Tasking System, others a service of status chekony, which allows seers to check the desired set status information such as Current Powision if and Current State (e.g., Decision State).
Plos One (zi)	2 - Parallel	PLOS One focuses on the publication of	PLOS One is an open access mags journal published by the Public Library of Science (PLOS). The journal covers	2. PLOS ONE waives all formatting requirements until the	PLOS One has separeated lists that covers all aspects of submission. The nanigational side bar is also deer and easy-to-use.	Researchers and academics who are interested in accessible; peer-enriewed scientific studies across all areas of science and medicine.	The general design of PLOS One is clean and easy to navigate. The fost hierarchy is clear, which significantly enhances readability. PLOS One also features a sidebar that keeps track of each section.	PLOS One's interaction toyle is centered around its submission and review process. The platform offers authors the ability to saidly brack their manuscript through the review process, engage with reviework conversels, and respond to additional decisions. This level of interaction is focused on themseprency and facilitating a dialogue between authors, reviewers, and editor
MIT Prose	1 - Analogous	MIT Press is not a platform particularly for submitting acodemic discertalizes but a publisher of books and journals for the dissemination of scholarly works.	MIT Press is a university press which has been a pioneer in the open access movement in academic publishing and publishes a number of academic journals.	each journal's homepage. MIT Press provides a page titled "Info for Prospective Authors" that includes links for	Although submission requirements are different from each journal, the instructions are provided following a consistent basis structure amons all journals. The instructions are divided into faur accitons: Savinission Guidelines, Publication Agreement, Open Access, and Publication Ethics.	Loading researchers, scholars, and educators around the globe at the intersection of science, lookeslogy, at, social science, and design.	The MIT Press features a modern and simple website with minimal visual elements. However, the design style of each submission portal wate and lacks consistency with the main pages of the MIT Press site.	Unlike ProCuest, MTT Press does not offer a unified portal for reareging submissions serous steps areas. Each prend has fix own submission system, featuring distinct logics and shudures, porcedally settleding interaction time and confusing users submissing multiple requests.
Sheridan Communications	2 - Paratiel	Sheriden Communications offers similar services to ProQuest (e.g. publishing) but are not competing spocifically for thesis/closeration submitters.	Sheridan Communications is a company that provides digital printing and werehouse services for books, scholarly journals, and magazines.	The site includes detailed lists of all equipment used throughout the printing process.	The site has overall poor instructional clarity. For each service provided, there is a "Request Quote" link that offers little clarification on what into is necessary to receive an accurate quote. An expert may be able to navigate, but a layman would should.	Clairs whose goal is to order privisio copies or	Sharidan Communication's site design is basic-clean and functional but not overly aesthotically pleasing. Some images are low resolution and cannot be scaled up on click.	The site includes different pages, most of which link to their "Request Quote" page. The options for interacting with the product are extremely irrefect.