
Analyzing Qualitative Data with MAXQDA

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Analyzing Qualitative Data with MAXQDA

Text, Audio, and Video

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Preface

“To begin at the beginning” is the opening line of the play *Under Milk Wood* by Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. So, we also want to start here at the beginning and start with some information about the history of the analysis software MAXQDA. This story is quite long; it begins in 1989 with a first version of the software, then just called “MAX,” for the operating system DOS and a book in the German language. The book’s title was *Text Analysis Software for the Social Sciences. Introduction to MAX and Textbase Alpha* written by Udo Kuckartz, published by Gustav Fischer in 1992. Since then, there have been many changes and innovations: technological, conceptual, and methodological. MAXQDA has its roots in social science methodology; the original name MAX was reference to the sociologist Max Weber, whose methodology combined quantitative and qualitative methods, explanation, and understanding in a way that was unique at the time, the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the first versions, MAX (later named winMAX and MAXQDA) has always been a very innovative analysis software. In 1994, it was one of the first programs with a graphical user interface; since 2001, it has used Rich Text Format with embedded graphics and objects. Later, MAXQDA was the first QDA program (QDA stands for qualitative data analysis) with a special version for Mac computers that included all analytical functions. Since autumn 2015, MAXQDA has been available in almost identical versions for Windows and Mac, so that users can switch between operating systems without having to familiarize themselves with a new interface or changed functionality. This compatibility and feature equality between Mac and Windows versions is unique and greatly facilitates team collaboration. MAXQDA has also come up with numerous innovations in the intervening years: a logically and very intuitively designed user interface, very versatile options for memos and comments, numerous visualization options, the summary grid as a middle level of analysis between primary data and categories, and much more, for instance, transcription, geolinks, weight scores for coding, analysis of PDF files, and Twitter analysis. Last but not least, the mixed methods features are worth mentioning, in which MAXQDA has long played a pioneering role.

This list already shows that today MAXQDA is much more than text analysis software: the first chapter of this book contains a representation of the data types that MAXQDA can analyze today (in version 2018) and shows which file formats can be processed. The large variety of data types is contrasted by an even greater number of

analysis methods. The variety of possibilities is fascinating on the one hand, but also poses us, as authors of this book, the question of what content we should select, which methods and procedures we should describe, and with what degree of detail? It makes a huge difference whether videos from school lessons are analyzed in the context of didactical classroom research, whether narrative interviews are analyzed in biographical research, or whether mixed methods evaluations of development policy measures are carried out. In all the three cases, a specific method is required, each of which would deserve its own treatise, its own step-by-step guide—and, of course, there are many other fields of application in addition to these, such as nursing research, environmental research, and technology research. We have tried to deal with as many topics as possible; above all, we focus on those aspects that have a multi-use character and play the same role in many fields of application, in many types of data and methods. This includes, first and foremost, questions relating to the formation of categories, to which we pay particular attention.

Structure of the Book

In the *first main part*, the basic functions of MAXQDA are presented after a methodical introduction. The structure follows the logic of the research process. The first chapter “Analyzing qualitative data with software” contains a short methodological introduction and gives an overview of the analysis options. The following chapters deal with the management of the interface of MAXQDA (Chap. 2), preparation and import of data (Chap. 3), and handling and transcription of audio and video data (Chap. 4).

Reading, reflecting, and exploring are the beginning of intensive work with the data (Chap. 5). The central analytical activity of coding is the subject of Chap. 6 (text data and PDF) and Chap. 7 (video data and images). The following Chap. 8 “Building a coding frame” focuses on the important question of the construction of the category system. Following the logic of a step-by-step guide, the ninth chapter then deals with the question of how coded segments can be retrieved and which forms of further work follow, for example for the differentiation of codes. Chapter 10 “Using variables and quantifying codes” is of particular interest for mixed methods approaches, but the chapter is also important for all those who have collected additional data, such as sociodemographic information, in the context of problem-oriented interviews and want to combine it with qualitative data. Chapter 10 concludes the basic part of the book. Up to this point, the chapters should be read sequentially, as they are largely based on each other. This recommendation applies in particular to readers who do not yet have any knowledge of computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data.

The *second main part* of the book is problem oriented (Chaps. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16); special analysis problems are discussed here. While the first main part could best be read sequentially from front to back, the chapters of the second application-related part can be read independently of each other. For example, when it comes to how to create a literature review, it is sufficient to read only Chap. 14 after the first

part. By structuring this part of the book to focus on applications, we hope to avoid the acquisition of “lazy knowledge,” which one unfortunately forgets very quickly according to experience. Here, in the second main part of the book, special types of analysis or special data types are discussed: Chapter 11 deals with paraphrasing techniques, case-oriented summaries, and case comparisons. Chapter 12 is devoted to the questions of how to discover relationships, how to perform group comparisons, and which forms of presentation and visualization of the results are possible with MAXQDA. Chapter 13 is devoted to mixed methods approaches, in particular the possibilities of integrating qualitative and quantitative research. The following two chapters deal with special forms of analysis: literature reviews (Chap. 14) and focus group analysis (Chap. 15). Chapter 16 focuses on a very popular form of mixed methods research, namely the analysis of (online) survey data with closed and open questions.

The *third main part* of the book, covering the last four chapters, is again devoted to general topics that are independent of specific types of analysis: Chapter 17 deals with the visual representation of relationships, for example in the form of information graphics, concept maps, causal networks, and models; Chap. 18 deals with the possibilities for teamwork, including the technical implementation of collaboration; and Chap. 19 deals with the question of consistency when different people share the work of coding the data material. The final Chap. 20 is devoted to questions of documentation and archiving that arise at the very end of a project such as how the analytical work, for example, the coding frame, can be documented.

This book is consciously written with the goal of optimal handling of MAXQDA. Although reference is made to methodological literature, anyone who wants to learn how a qualitative content analysis works, for example, or which methods of video analysis exist, should fall back on the multifaceted methodological literature. In this book, we convey the knowledge necessary to implement existing methods with MAXQDA as comprehensibly and clearly as possible.

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