Harnessing the power of MAXQDA for conducting social science research

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Introduction

MAXQDA is a professional qualitative software designed for content analysis and mixed methods research. This poster provides an overview of the “Four Stages of Research,” a conceptual model I’ve developed for conducting a qualitative research project. This was designed as tool for effectively using MAXQDA to conduct qualitative legal research, but can be applied to almost any social science qualitative project. MAXQDA has transformed how I conduct my research on the impact and implementation of judicial policies by lower courts.

The Four Stages of Research provides a conceptual model for thinking through a research project:

- Identify the research questions and conceptual framework of the research design.
- Collect the data and create a workspace and analytical process to evaluate it in MAXQDA.
- Conduct a thematic analysis of cases, drawing on the software’s analytical tools to interpret, refine, and make sense of the data, looking for patterns, quantifying findings, and identifying examples.
- Organize the results and write the final product.

This poster provides an overview of the Four Stages of Research, which is more completely explored in the MAXQDA web tutorials I developed for students wanting to use MAXQDA for qualitative research.

https://www.4stagesofresearch.com

Stage 1 - Conceptual Framework

MAXQDA can only be an effective tool if there is a conceptual framework and meaningful questions guiding the research. The initial stage is really no different from that of any other research project. You develop an analytical plan for the research, by identifying initial research questions and conducting a literature review. The literature review should provide the researcher with an initial set of issues to explore. MAXQDA can be used to organize the literature review, and a separate project can be created to content analyze and “code” the key concepts and findings in the literature.

Stage 2 - MAXQDA Workspace

The second stage of the research process is where the literature review meets the research design. It includes identifying the data to be analyzed. Data can come in almost any form, including written documents, “tweets” from Twitter, You Tube videos, and audio files. The data can be formatted in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, Adobe Acrobat PDF, audio, video, or text files. Documents can then be easily imported into a MAXQDA project.

The workspace includes the documents to be used, a codebook of concepts to be content analyzed, a spreadsheet-like list of variables to summarize the data, and a space for note-taking. I create a codebook by doing a first read through a sample of documents, then refining the codebook, and finalizing the document variables.

Stage 3

Thematic analysis of cases. This is the heart of the research.

Stage 4

Writing, analysis, final product

Draw on the descriptive statistics, the coded segments, memos, and visual tools. This is not necessarily a linear process.

Codebook and Content Analysis

The Four Stages of Research

Stage 1

Identify the guiding questions that will shape the study

Stage 2

Create the workspace and set up the process to evaluate the data

Stage 3

Thematic analysis of cases. This is the heart of the research.

Stage 4

Writing, analysis, final product

Draw on the descriptive statistics, the coded segments, memos, and visual tools. This is not necessarily a linear process.

Analytical Tools

- Codebook and Content Analysis
- Code configuration, Code Brewer, Search, Queries
- Compare Groups, Create Code, Create Document Sets
- Interactive code matrix, word-cloud, select by variables
- code co-occurrence matrix, interactive word trees
- Deep Dive: individual record interpretation of keyword in context, word combinations, etc.

Thematic Analysis: “Field Performance”

Conduct literature review

- Identify initial research questions

Prepare research workspace

- Identify data to be studied

Import documents into MAXQDA

- Create initial list of codes and variables

Develop Analytical Plan

- Categorize by major themes

First read through

- Code outcomes and initial variables

- Auto-code on key themes and concepts

- Write memos as interesting points are revealed

- Do initial descriptive to look for patterns

- Use visual tools to look for interrelated concepts

- Quantity findings and identify examples

Evaluate the data

Emergence

- Further refine data, re-reading memos creating summary memos, and writing analysis results

The Four Stages of Research

MAXQDA describes itself with the tag line “The Art of Data Analysis.” These words capture the heart of the Four Stages of Research. Stage 3 and 4 involves reading, coding, writing memos (taking notes), looking for patterns and themes, and then engaging in a thematic analysis of cases.

Once the initial content analysis completed, you can begin the creative and often emergent process of analysis: summarizing the data, looking for patterns, quantifying them, identifying core examples, and then further refining the data and findings. MAXQDA also has a full set of statistical tools that you can use for mixed methods analysis. As this process unfolds, you are ready to write your final product.