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A QUICK LOOK AT NVIVO

By Margaret Phillips and Jing Lu, Purdue University Libraries

Introduction

NVivo (QSR International, n.d.a) is software developed by QSR International for qualitative data analysis, such as content analysis and narrative analysis. The software provides a workspace for researchers to store, manage, query, and analyze unstructured data, including text, images, audio, video, and other data types. NVivo has been used in many library and information science studies, including to analyze interview data (Wiley & Mischo, 2016), student assignments (Insua, Lantz, & Armstrong, 2018; Phillips & Zwicky, 2017), and survey data (Gibbs, Boettcher, Hollingsworth & Slania, 2012).

NVivo allows users to complete multiple qualitative analysis functions on the platform, including sorting and filtering raw data, discovering and building relationships among data, assigning and defining themes and categories for data, visualizing data analysis results, and creating reports.

This article reviews NVivo on the following five criteria: functionality, learnability, collaboration, support, and cost.

Functionality

NVivo is available to download for both Windows and Mac users. Windows users can choose from three progressively robust versions of the software, NVivo Starter, NVivo Pro, or NVivo Plus. NVivo Starter provides many basic functions, including the abilities to import and analyze textual data in standard file formats (e.g., .txt, .docx, .pdf), create codes (referred to as “nodes” and “cases” in the software), query text, record memos, and export codebooks with definitions and hierarchies. NVivo Pro and NVivo Plus

provide all of the features and functions of NVivo Starter, and offer more advanced options for working with data. They allow users to analyze a broader range of data sources, such as audio, video, datasets, social media comments, and email exports from Microsoft Outlook. Additionally, they offer increased data visualization options (e.g., the ability to create concept maps) and the ability to create predefined and customized reports. NVivo Plus is the most comprehensive option available, incorporating features like automated data analysis to detect themes and sentiments and further data visualization features, such as the ability to create visuals of social media output relationships. Mac users currently have only one option, NVivo Mac. The Mac version has less functionality than NVivo Pro and Plus, but generally offers more than NVivo Starter. A table comparing all of the versions is available on the NVivo website (QSR International, n.d.b).

Of particular interest to librarians, all versions of NVivo can be used to support literature review preparation. Users can import citations and full text articles from the citation managers Endnote, Mendeley, Zotero, and Refworks. Nvivo can then be used to identify commonalities, create tags, look for gaps in the literature, and develop frameworks based on themes or concepts. Researchers can even write their literature reviews in the “memo” area of the software and link to corresponding evidence.

Learnability

NVivo has a learning curve, but it is fairly easy to get started with the software after receiving a brief orientation from an experienced user or consulting the freely available training resources (e.g., guides, video tutorials, webinars) offered by QSR International. QSR also offers fee-based training courses, workshops, and personal assistance (online

and in-person). NVivo's appearance and structure share a few similarities with Microsoft Word and Excel, providing some immediate familiarity to new users. The software helps streamline qualitative analysis, but users do need to be knowledgeable about this type of analysis in order to make the most of the software; NVivo itself does not teach coding processes and other components of qualitative analysis. Researchers who have previous experience with coding using other methods or tools (e.g. Excel) will have a shorter learning curve with NVivo.

Collaboration

QSR International offers an additional product called "NVivo for Teams" that allows multiple users the ability to simultaneously access and edit a project. The software tracks changes made by each team member. There are options to assign roles and limit capabilities based on roles. NVivo for Teams is currently only available to Windows users. A no-cost workaround to purchasing this add-on is to store project files in a shared server space. This allows multiple researchers the ability to access and work with the data. A limitation to this workaround is there is no option for simultaneous access, only one person is permitted to open a project file at a time.

Support

QSR International provides technical support for users to understand, learn, and share experiences with NVivo. Basic support is provided by email from 9:00 am to 5:30 pm Australian Eastern Standard Time, Monday-Friday, for all NVivo users. Extended hours and phone assistance are available for users with certain license options. NVivo also maintains an online technical resource center with answers to frequently asked questions. NVivo has an active, extensive online community where existing and potential customers

can get information about product use cases and updates, exchange experiences in user forums, and participate in testing new product features.

Cost

All NVivo versions are available to download for a free 14-day trial period. After a trial expires, QSR International provides multiple license options. There are standard licenses, education licenses, and student licenses. Additionally, there are pricing options for single users, multiple users, and organizational customers.

A single license is suitable for an individual researcher who needs to install NVivo on no more than two devices. The multiple license option allows the software to be obtained at discounted rates, with exact costs being dependent upon the number of licenses purchased (more licenses, larger discounts). Enterprise-level licenses can be customized for each organization's needs.

Both NVivo Starter and NVivo Pro are available with standard, education, and student licenses. NVivo Starter is currently priced at \$700, \$350, and \$75 for a single user standard, education, or student license, respectively. The single user price of NVivo Pro varies from \$120 to \$1380 depending upon the license type needed. NVivo Plus costs \$1900 for a single standard license and \$950 for a single education license, but is not available for purchase with a student license. Users interested in the Windows "NVivo for Teams" product need to contact the company, cost information for this add-on is not provided on the QSR International website. NVivo Mac has standard, education, and student license options available, with single user costs ranging from \$103-\$1140.

Recommendation

The authors believe NVivo software adds significant value, especially for users who

routinely perform qualitative analysis research, or plan to work on a large qualitative project. The platform does provide a comprehensive solution for users to sort, manage, and analyze data. Inevitably, there is a learning curve for users to get familiar with the software.

QSR International offers many free instructional resources. Most of the functions are well explained and demonstrated in the software guide and free tutorials. However, sometimes, it is still difficult to understand how to perform advanced functions and it is necessary to consult the additional help resources or the online community of users.

The cost for Nvivo is fairly reasonable for educators and students. Some higher education institutions have purchased institutional licenses providing the software for free, or at much discounted rates, to students, faculty and staff. For independent researchers, the price might be a major barrier to adopting the software.

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