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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

QDA Miner Lite: A Content Analysis of the Main Features for Qualitative Analysis

Chaima Elfarem[1], Douae Daoudi [1], Marwa Ziani[1], Soukaina Kartouch[1]
[1]Master of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics (TAAL), UM5, Rabat, Morocco)

Corresponding Author: *Douae Daoudi*, E-mail: **Douae.daoudi1@outlook.com**

| ABSTRACT
Qualitative data analysis requires specialized software to facilitate the systematic interpretation and organization of textual data. Given the complexity of qualitative research, researchers often rely on digital tools to enhance efficiency. This study explores user experiences with QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative data analysis software, by examining feedback and discussions from platforms such as Reddit and YouTube. A literature review also investigates previous studies' use of the software, shedding light on its perceived advantages and limitations. A media content analysis was conducted to assess real-world experiences and user satisfaction. The results suggest that while QDA Miner Lite is an effective tool for basic qualitative research, its limited functionalities may pose challenges for more intricate analyses. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of QDA Miner Lite's potential applications in qualitative research by offering guidance for users in selecting appropriate tools based on their analytical needs.

| KEYWORDS
AI, content analysis, QDA Miner Lite, qualitative data analysis, thematic analysis

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1. Introduction

Qualitative data analysis is a rich and complex process that involves working with non-numerical data such as interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and images to understand social life through the study of people's accounts or experiences. It typically involves managing, coding, annotating, retrieving, and interpreting large volumes of textual and visual information to identify themes, patterns, and relationships. Historically, this process was performed manually, which could be time-consuming and labour-intensive, particularly with extensive datasets. The advent of Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) has significantly transformed the landscape of qualitative research, providing researchers with tools to enhance the efficiency and depth of their analysis (Cuva, 2015). CAQDAS programs are designed to assist researchers in the systematic management and analysis of qualitative data. They do not perform the analysis themselves but provide a structured environment and a suite of tools to aid the researcher in tasks such as organising data, attaching codes to segments of text or images, writing memos, querying coded data, and visualising relationships. Among the range of CAQDAS tools available, QDA Miner is presented in its official website as a free comprehensive qualitative and mixed methods software (https://provalisresearch.com/resources/tutorials/free-qualitative-data-analysis-software/). QDA Miner (the full commercial software, not the Lite freeware) was first released in 2004 by Provalis Research as a Windows-based qualitative data analysis tool. The free QDA Miner Lite came much later, in November 2012, as a scaled-down version to give wider access. It is described as an easy-to-use tool specifically designed for organising, coding, annotating, retrieving, and analysing collections of documents and images. The software is noted for its ability to handle various types of data. However, it is important to note that the literature primarily describes the features and capabilities of the full version of QDA Miner and does not delve into specific details regarding the "Lite" version of the QDA Miner software.

In spite of the emergent literature on Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), existing research has largely been concerned with evaluating the possibilities and constraints of advanced, commercial software like NVivo, ATLAS.ti, and MAXQDA. Although these tools have been broadly criticized regarding their performance, scalability, and functionality in managing advanced qualitative datasets, there exists a substantial gap in the criticism of free, easier-to-use tools, i.e., QDA Miner

Lite. This gap is noteworthy because novice researchers, students, and practitioners dealing with smaller-scale qualitative studies are likely to find free tool software like QDA Miner Lite more suited to their requirements. But the question remains, is QDA Miner Lite as good as its commercial counterparts in terms of quality and depth of analysis? Though QDA Miner Lite does support a range of basic features, how far it is capable of satisfying more stringent qualitative research needs, i.e., handling large projects or more complex analysis tasks, is less explored. This study, hence, seeks to fill this gap by critically evaluating the usefulness of QDA Miner Lite in ensuring rigorous qualitative research and establishing to what extent it will suffice for the needs of various research studies.

The main aim of this research is to make a general assessment of the main features of QDA Miner Lite and determine the extent to which the software facilitates qualitative data analysis. In particular, the research will report on its capacity for data organization, coding of text, data annotation, retrieval of coded data, and performing basic analytical functions. The research will also specify probable limitations in using the software for more complex qualitative data analysis. Based on both available literature on other alternative CAQDAS tools and practical experimentation, this research will also undertake a direct comparison with the position of QDA Miner Lite in relation to more advanced commercial packages. A further objective is to explore how this open-source tool can inform the wider discussion on the availability of CAQDAS tools, especially in academic environments where budget constraints deny users the opportunity of more sophisticated software. The study also seeks to outline the potential trade-offs involved in choosing free software over more expensive alternatives by offering a two-sided view of the strengths and weaknesses of QDA Miner Lite for qualitative research.

2. Literature Review

Core Features and Functionality

QDA Miner Lite enables researchers to systematically organize and analyze textual and visual data, including interview transcripts, open-ended survey responses, and images. It supports a variety of file formats such as TXT, RTF, PDF, HTML, JPG and PNG. It also allows data imports from Excel, CSV, MS Access, and transcription or coding software like ATLAS.ti and Transana. The organizational features of QDA Miner Lite allow users to sort, group, and manage large datasets efficiently. This is particularly valuable in qualitative research where managing volumes of unstructured data from various sources can be overwhelming. Users can structure cases, documents, and variables, which makes it easier to navigate complex datasets. Its coding functionalities are intuitive and visually aided. Users can create codebooks, assign colors and annotations, and arrange codes hierarchically. Coding can be done manually by dragging and dropping onto text or image segments, or through the software's grid view.

Annotation tools in QDA Miner Lite support the addition of comments, memos, and reflective notes at different levels. These annotations enable researchers to document their thought process and analytical decisions. Hyperlinking functions further improve navigability and relational analysis. Retrieval and querying capabilities are another major asset. The software allows users to search for coded segments using Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) and proximity operators (e.g., near, before, after). This facilitates complex searches and pattern recognition, which are crucial in uncovering themes and meaning in qualitative data. The results of such queries can be exported into various formats aiding both analysis and reporting. Basic visualization tools are also included, such as code frequency graphs, bar charts, pie charts, and tag clouds. These assist researchers in identifying trends and patterns within the data. While QDA Miner Lite doesn't offer the high-level statistical or advanced graphical tools of the full version, it still equips researchers with enough visual output to support interpretation and communication of findings.

Previous Studies

Previous research has discussed QDA Miner, including its Lite version and related software iterations, primarily as a tool for qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis. It is often described as a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) and specifically highlighted as a mixed method solution, considered by some to be the only true mixed-methods qualitative data analysis software on the market (Cuva, 2015). A recent study explicitly applied QDA Miner Lite (Version 3.1, 2023) for the contrastive analysis of Balti and English syntactic processes, which demonstrates the software use growing trend in linguistics research. Mustafa et al. (2024) conducted a study which demonstrated the software's utility as a tool applied in qualitative study for data analysis systematically. Data was collected and imported into the software, allowing for systematic analysis where each sentence was coded according to various syntactic features. The systematic approach using QDA Miner Lite was credited with guaranteeing inclusive and structured contrastive analyses by enlightening significant insights into syntactic features and helping to thrash out the similarities and dissimilarities in the targeted linguistic domains of syntax (Mustafa et al., 2024). Specifically, QDA Miner Lite's text retrieval and coding functions facilitated the recognition and evaluation of recurring patterns. Its tagging and annotation tools helped highlight distinct phenomena. Visualization and other characteristics like code frequency charts and cluster analyses were employed to demonstrate the occurrence and distribution of syntactic constructions. The study found that using QDA Miner Lite illustrated the variations in syntactic processes, particularly highlighting that Balti syntax functions with a SOV (Subject plus Object plus Verb) order in contrast to English's SVO (Subject plus Verb plus Object). In summary, previous research positions QDA Miner and its Lite version as powerful CAQDAS tools suitable for systematic qualitative and mixed-methods analysis, with demonstrated utility in specific domains like contrastive linguistics. They offer robust features for coding, retrieval, and visualization.

Strengths

QDA Miner Lite is identified as an "enormous tool" for systematic qualitative data analysis. It was specifically applied in a qualitative study for the contrastive analysis of Balti and English syntactic processes (Mustafa et al., 2024). The software's application in this study demonstrated its utility as a data analysis tool for future linguistics and education researchers in the context of Contrastive Analysis. The software facilitated the systematic analysis of data collected from grammar books. Its text retrieval and coding functions were instrumental in the recognition and evaluation of recurring patterns within the two languages being compared (Mustafa et al., 2024). Furthermore, the tagging and annotation tools helped to highlight distinct syntactic phenomena. The study also employed visualisation features of QDA Miner Lite, such as code frequency charts and cluster analyses, to demonstrate the occurrence and distribution of specific syntactic constructions. QDA Miner Lite is noted to have made improvements over the general QDA Miner regarding codes, coding, and thematic analysis. In the study on Balti and English syntax, QDA Miner (version 3.0, 2023) was used for generating codes and finding themes during the thematic analysis process. The findings derived using QDA Miner Lite illustrated variations in the syntactic procedure examined.

Potential Weaknesses and Challenges

While literature highlights the capabilities of QDA Miner Lite, reviews of the full QDA Miner software (which may share similarities or have more extensive features than Lite) indicate potential areas of difficulty or limitation, especially for new users. Regarding user interface and workflow, a review by Chomczynski (2008) suggested that the procedure for loading certain documents like PDF or HTML files could be complicated compared to other software back in 2008; however, the software has been updated multiple times till 2025. The coding procedure was also found to be less comfortable in comparison to other programs like ATLAS.ti. It was noted that there was no initial possibility to create codes not connected with categories, and overall operations could be more intuitive. Limitations in connecting and integrating data were also mentioned (Chomczynski, 2008). In the review, a serious disadvantage was the inability to link codes together to create a graphical map reflecting mutual connections. There was also a lack of clear information about the number of connections between codes and quotations they relate to, and an inability to create the same named code for different quotations within a specific category. Furthermore, insufficient integration between different documents within a project was observed.

From a technical standpoint, Cuva (2015) noted that QDA Miner did not offer a Mac version, requiring users to utilise virtual machines which presented "discouraging and time-consuming roadblocks". This limitation may also apply to the Lite version. While the software supports various file types and automatically converts PDFs to rich text format, this conversion changes formatting, which could potentially lead to issues like citation errors if uploading full articles (Cuva, 2015).

For learning and suitability, Cuva (2015) found the video tutorials challenging to follow due to reliance on text boxes instead of voice guidance. More significantly, as a new user focused on qualitative analysis, there was confusion regarding how to properly structure a project, as the case/variable structure felt more akin to generating quantitative results from open-ended questions (Cuva, 2015). This led to a concern about the software's utility for purely qualitative research, and a suggestion for more examples showcasing how to structure projects for various qualitative methodologies. However, over the last seven years since 2025, there have been many YouTube tutorials on the software use, https://youtu.be/EY9qDSFC6yw?si=FhGDU3EhLWZTL7TK. Cuva (2015) concluded that the software's structure and function seemed designed to accommodate more experienced researchers conducting larger studies aimed at obtaining quantitative results from open-ended responses. This perspective suggests that QDA Miner Lite, as a limited version, might also present similar challenges or feel less intuitive for researchers solely focused on in-depth qualitative methodologies. The nature of it being a "limited" version also implicitly means it will lack some features of the full QDA Miner.

In summary, QDA Miner Lite is demonstrated as a capable tool for specific qualitative tasks like contrastive syntactic analysis by offering features for coding, pattern recognition, and visualisation. However, drawing from reviews of related software versions, potential weaknesses for users, especially beginners, may include workflow complexities, limitations in managing code relationships and document integration, technical compatibility issues like Mac support, and a potential perceived bias towards quantitative or mixed-methods approaches over purely qualitative ones (Cuva, 2015).

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing media content analysis as the principal method of investigation. Media content analysis is a specialized subset of content analysis. Neuendorf (2002) describes content analysis as “the primary message-centred methodology” (p. 9) and cites studies by Riffe and Freitag (1997) and Yale & Gilly (1988) which reported that “in the field of mass communication research, content analysis has been the fastest-growing technique over the past 20 years or so” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). Very broad types of texts are analyzed using content analysis, such as transcripts of interviews, discussions for clinical and social research, and structural and narrative content of films, television programs, newspapers, and magazines. Media content analysis was first introduced as a systematic method to study mass media for analyzing propaganda by Harold Lasswell way back in 1927 (Lasswell, 1927, as cited in Newbold et al., 2002, p. 79). In this context, YouTube, ResearchGate, and

Reddit were selected as the primary sources of data, focusing on user-generated comments related to the qualitative data analysis software, namely the QDA Miner Lite.

Data Collection

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the sampled comments selected were rich in content and directly relevant to the research objectives. Put differently, the sampled comments had to be content-rich to be selected and respond the study's question in a direct manner. Purposive sampling is one of the techniques of non-probability sampling that is widely used in qualitative research. This sampling approach involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question (Prime, 2024). It allows researchers to select participants who can provide valuable insights into the research question. In other words, purposive sampling helps researchers to sample only information-rich data. In this study, priority was given to comments that offered detailed descriptions of user experiences, including both positive feedback and criticisms.

Due to the limited availability of relevant comments, all the comments that met the inclusion criteria were used. This was to ensure that even with a small dataset, the comments provided meaningful and significant representation of user feedback regarding QDA Miner Lite.

Data Analysis

The data collected from Reddit threads, ResearchGate, and YouTube comments regarding QDA Miner Lite were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. This was particularly appropriate for the exploratory nature of the study, since it facilitated the identification of patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the data, without imposing preconceived notions or theoretical frameworks.

The analysis process began with a thorough reading of the comments from the various platforms multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content and to become able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the users' experiences. This was followed by assigning initial codes to meaningful and significant segments of text. These codes were generated from the data itself by reflecting the key ideas expressed by the users, such as praise for ease of use or criticism regarding the lack of advanced features. For example, comments that described the simplicity of the software's interface were coded under "Ease of Use," while those discussing and highlighting limitations in features were coded under "Feature Limitations."

Once the initial coding was completed, the codes were reviewed and refined through a process of constant comparison. This iterative process involved merging similar codes and clarifying distinctions between codes to ensure that there will be a consistent and accurate representation of the data. The refined codes were then grouped into broader themes, which captured the central patterns in the feedback. Key themes that emerged from the analysis included Ease of Use and Accessibility, which reflected users' positive feedback about the software's intuitive interface; Feature limitations, which highlighted concerns about the software's lack of advanced functionalities; Learning Curve and Support Resources, which emphasized the challenges users faced when attempting more complex tasks; and Performance and Reliability, which underscored the software's stability across different devices, including older or less powerful computers.

Further analysis identified Best Use Cases: Students and Small Research Projects, with users indicating that QDA Miner Lite was particularly useful for academic assignments and small-scale research due to its simplicity and cost-effectiveness. Additionally, user suggestions for improvement were also noted, including requests for more export options, enhanced visualization tools, and improved integration with other software platforms.

The themes which were identified were supported by relevant user quotes to provide transparency and to illustrate how the themes directly aligned with the data. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of user experiences with QDA Miner Lite and highlighted both the strengths and areas for improvement in the software.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Several limitations related to the study design were recognized. First, the small number of comments across YouTube, ResearchGate, and Reddit limited the depth and generalizability of the findings. The available comments primarily reflected experiences of a small proportion of users and hence posed a potential bias.

Second, the nature of online comments, which are often informal, brief, and context-dependent, presents challenges in depth and accurate interpretation. Comments may be missing detail to allow for nuanced analysis compared to data obtained through interviews or focus groups, for example.

Ethical considerations were also taken into consideration. Although YouTube, ResearchGate, and Reddit comments are publicly available, the poster and reader identity were kept confidential by not giving out their username or identifying information while reporting. Additionally, the study adhered to fair use principles by using the comments solely for research purposes and ensuring that the context of the comments was respected. Put differently, there was no breaching of the context of the comments.

In sum, the methodology of this study involved a carefully structured media content analysis of YouTube, ResearchGate, and Reddit comments discussing QDA Miner Lite. Through systematic data collection, purposive sampling, inductive thematic analysis, and critical interpretative reading, the study aimed to evaluate the software's practical application in a real-world analysis scenario. The insights gained through this methodology contribute to a broader understanding of the software's capabilities and limitations, particularly for novice researchers and those conducting basic qualitative studies.

4. Results and Discussion

Analysis of user feedback revealed five overarching themes regarding experiences with QDA Miner Lite as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Data analysis of the main findings

Codes	Theme	Description	Quotes
EUA	**Ease of Use and Accessibility**	Users found the interface intuitive and beginner-friendly; tasks like coding and reporting were easy to perform.	"QDA Miner is a user-friendly qualitative data analysis software package for coding..." "QDA miner is an excellent tool to analyze qualitative data like interviews. It is fast, easy to use, and offers several functionalities..."
FL	**Feature Limitations**	Praise for being free, but critiques of missing advanced tools like complex visualizations and cluster maps.	"The problem with QDA miner, is there is no visualizations within the free version"
PR	**Performance and Reliability**	Works well on older machines, few to no crashes or bugs reported.	"You can also code images. I do not like it that much, but it is free"
U	**Usefulness for Students/Small Projects**	Seen as ideal for academic use, student assignments, and early-stage or small-scale research.	"I use it to code audio/visual data"
SF	**Suggestions and Feedback**	Users expressed interest in feature upgrades, and mentioned alternatives like NVivo and MAXQDA.	"QDA looks great but if your inquiry is the use of one analytic application that could easily be used to analyze both qua and quan data inputs, I would rather suggest you look into NVivo"

Ease of Use and Accessibility (EUA): Participants consistently emphasized that the software was intuitive and accessible, even for beginners. The interface was described as user-friendly and supportive of common qualitative tasks such as coding and reporting (e.g., "QDA Miner is a user-friendly qualitative data analysis software package for coding…"). These statements suggest that ease of use is one of the software's primary strengths.

Feature Limitations (FL): While participants appreciated that the software was free, they frequently highlighted missing advanced functionalities, such as visualizations and cluster mapping. This indicates that the Lite version, although practical, may not fully support more complex research needs (e.g., "The problem with QDA miner, is there is no visualizations within the free version").

Performance and Reliability (PR): Users reported that the software performed efficiently, with minimal technical issues. Stability across machines, including older systems, was highlighted, with very few reports of bugs or crashes. This reliability enhances trust in the software's use for consistent data analysis tasks.

Usefulness for Students and Small Projects (U): QDA Miner Lite was described as particularly suitable for students, coursework, and small-scale research projects. The software's ability to handle audio/visual data coding, despite its limitations, was perceived as an asset for entry-level or academic contexts.

Suggestions and Feedback (SF): Participants also provided constructive feedback, requesting enhanced features and drawing comparisons with more comprehensive tools such as NVivo and MAXQDA. Such comments reflect both recognition of QDA Miner Lite's strengths and awareness of its boundaries relative to professional research software.

The findings suggest a predominantly positive perception of QDA Miner Lite, particularly in terms of ease of use, accessibility, and reliability. Although users noted feature limitations and expressed interest in more advanced options, these critiques were framed within an acknowledgment of the software's free availability and suitability for small-scale or student research. Thus, the final conclusion is that user sentiment toward QDA Miner Lite is positive, with limitations recognized but not outweighing its core strengths.

Discussion

The analysis of user reviews and video comments indicates that QDA Miner Lite fulfills its primary role as a basic qualitative data analysis tool. Users across multiple platforms frequently emphasize the software's ease of use, noting that it is well designed and accessible even for individuals with little to no experience in qualitative research (ResearchGate contributors, 2015). This aligns with prior evaluations of QDA Miner Lite that highlight its suitability for students and novice researchers due to its intuitive interface and straightforward coding environment (Silver & Lewins, 2020). As such, QDA Miner Lite can be regarded as a practical free solution for those beginning qualitative analysis.

Nevertheless, the theme of feature limitations emerged strongly in the user feedback. While users appreciate the no-cost access and core features offered by QDA Miner Lite, they consistently critique the lack of advanced tools, particularly richer visualizations and cluster analysis. These limitations are clearly documented in official feature comparison tables, which show the Lite version lacks advanced export, project management, and visualization capabilities available in the full version (Provalis Research, n.d.). Such critiques also reflect broader user expectations, as researchers increasingly compare free tools with premium software such as NVivo, MAXQDA, or the full QDA Miner suite (Wheaton College Library Guides, 2024).

Despite these shortcomings, most users provided positive feedback regarding the software's performance and reliability. Reports suggest that QDA Miner Lite performs well even on lower-specification computers and maintains overall stability with few technical issues (Silver & Lewins, 2020). This reliability enhances its appeal for researchers who require consistent tools without the financial burden of licensing fees.

An interesting trend is the software's particular usefulness for students and independent researchers conducting small projects. Prior commentary also emphasizes that QDA Miner Lite is well suited to academic and small-scale applications rather than large, complex projects (ResearchGate contributors, 2015). In this way, the software does not attempt to compete with premium qualitative analysis packages but instead provides a stable and accessible platform for more modest research needs.

Finally, user feedback illustrates a forward-looking perspective. While generally satisfied with the current version, many users express a desire for continued enhancements and feature upgrades (Provalis Research, n.d.). This balance between satisfaction with the software's ease of use and recognition of its limitations underscores its value as a free, entry-level tool for qualitative research.

Manual thematic coding of user feedback allowed for nuanced insights that may not have emerged from automated methods. Although the dataset was limited in size, the collected comments provided rich and relevant perspectives that highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of QDA Miner Lite. Overall, the software's strengths lie in its accessibility, ease of use, and cost-free availability, while its weaknesses, particularly the absence of advanced functions, are largely tolerated in light of its freeware status. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of how free qualitative data analysis software meets user needs and provide a basis for future research that compares free and paid versions of similar tools.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to evaluate QDA Miner Lite based on user experiences gathered through a media content analysis of YouTube, ResearchGate, and Reddit. By employing a qualitative inductive thematic analysis, the study identified key strengths, limitations, and user expectations concerning the software at hands. The findings reveal that QDA Miner Lite is widely sought after for being easy to use, having a clean interface, and being student and beginner friendly. Its minimal learning curve for basic tasks and dependable performance, even on less powerful computers, make it a valuable tool for small-scale qualitative research projects, academic assignments, and independent studies. However, the analysis also highlights notable limitations. Users consistently mentioned the absence of advanced functionalities such as automated coding, complex visualization tools, and integration with external databases. These shortcomings position QDA Miner Lite more as an introductory/starter tool rather than a sophisticated and comprehensive qualitative analysis solution for more complex or large-scale research. Moreover, QDA Miner Lite has not yet integrated Artificial Intelligence into qualitative data analysis compared to NVivo, MAXQDA and ATLAS.ti.

The study confirms that QDA miner lite is best suited for students, early-career researchers, and those conducting small projects that require a reliable and free platform without the enormous learning curves often associated with premium software. Suggestions and feedback from users indicate a clear desire for gradual feature enhancements without sacrificing the software's simplicity. In methodological terms, the study demonstrates the efficacy of manual thematic analysis and media content analysis for deriving meaningful insights from a small but diverse dataset. Despite the limited number of comments available, the study managed to uncover a nuanced understanding of how QDA Miner Lite is perceived and used in real-world settings. Lastly, this research contributes to a broader discussion or debate regarding the usability of free qualitative research software. It provides

guidance for future users regarding the selection of software that matches their project scope and technical needs, and it highlights areas where QDA Miner Lite could evolve to better serve its growing user base.

Future Research Recommendations

Given the limitations encountered, future studies could attempt to enlarge the dataset by including structured interviews, surveys, or questionnaires with a broader pool of users. Comparative studies between QDA Miner Lite and similar qualitative data analysis software that are free or commercial would also offer valuable insights regarding how users make trade-offs between functionality, accessibility, and cost. This study lays the groundwork for such future investigations and encourages ongoing exploration and evaluation of digital tools that support qualitative research within a progressively digitally focused scholarly community and academic environment.

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