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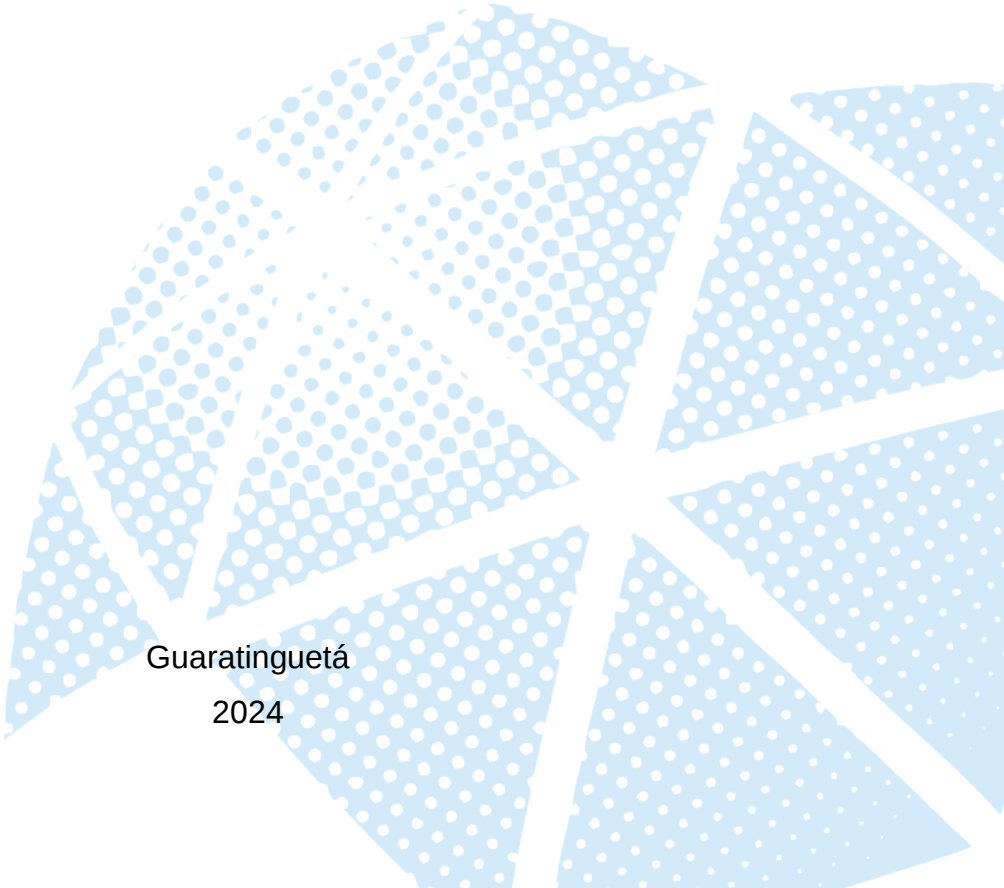
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THE np_x CHART: when the parameters are known and unknown

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THE np_x CHART: when the parameters are known and unknown

Thesis presented to the Graduate Program
in Engineering of the University of State
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Area: Production.

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POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THIS RESEARCH

In the thesis, statistical tools were suggested for monitoring processes in real-world scenarios where parameters like mean and variance are estimated. These tools were found to be more cost-effective, simpler, and, depending on the sample size, more efficient than existing methods.

IMPACTO POTENCIAL DESTA PESQUISA

Na tese, foram sugeridas ferramentas estatísticas para monitorar processos em cenários do mundo real, onde parâmetros como média e variância são estimados. Essas ferramentas mostraram-se mais econômicas, simples e, dependendo do tamanho da amostra, mais eficientes do que os métodos existentes.



MARIANA CRISTINA DE OLIVEIRA

**ESTA TESE FOI JULGADA ADEQUADA PARA A OBTENÇÃO DO TÍTULO DE
“DOUTORA EM ENGENHARIA MECÂNICA”**

**PROGRAMA: ENGENHARIA MECÂNICA
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APROVADA EM SUA FORMA FINAL PELO PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO



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JULHO de 2024

To my beloved parents, Antonio Carlos de
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ABSTRACT

Control charts are powerful tools used by many industries to monitor some quality characteristics and detect special causes of variation. If it is impractical to numerically represent the quality characteristic, attribute control charts, such as the np chart, are often used to monitor the number of nonconforming units. Attribute control charts are considered simpler, faster, and cheaper than variable control charts (such as the $\bar{X}$ chart) because they do not require the measurement of some quality characteristic; instead, professionals only need to count the number of nonconforming units in a sample. For this reason, the np control chart is also used to monitor not only the number of nonconforming units, but also the process average. The np_x control chart was introduced by Wu et al. (2009)(WU et al., 2009) to monitor the mean of a continuous variable using attribute inspection. The authors evaluated the performance of the np_x graph without considering the practical case where the parameters (such as p), necessary to calculate the control limits, must be estimated. The present work focuses on evaluating the performance of the np_x control chart when the parameters are estimated. Despite the initial fascination of the np_x chart for its perceived advantages over variable control charts – such as simplicity, speed and cost-effectiveness – inconsistencies in the results presented by Wu et al. (2009)(WU et al., 2009) are revealed. By addressing these inconsistencies, we offer alternative insights into the effectiveness of the np_x graph. Through an extensive investigation, involving derivations and numerical analysis, the scenarios in which the bilateral and unilateral np_x graphs outperform the $\bar{X}$ graph were determined. With this background, now with the corrected np_x graph, the impacts on parameter estimation were analyzed in detail. It was found that performance is affected mainly when the standard deviation of the process is estimated (cases KU and UU), presenting itself significantly different from what is nominally expected if the estimation of the parameters is not taken into account in the design of the graph. The number of reference samples needed to mitigate this effect makes the application of the np_x graph unfeasible. Therefore, adjustments to the UCL and k_w parameters are necessary. Such adjustments were investigated and proved to be efficient, enabling the np_x graph to offer equal or better performance to the $\bar{X}$ graph using numbers of usual reference samples. This work contributes significantly to a more nuanced understanding of the comparative advantages of different control chart methodologies, for variable and attribute data.

KEYWORDS: Attribute control charts; Parameter Estimation; Average Run Length; False Alarm Rate.

RESUMO

As cartas de controle são ferramentas poderosas usadas por muitas indústrias para monitorar algumas características de qualidade e detectar causas especiais de variação. Se for impraticável representar numericamente a característica de qualidade, gráficos de controle de atributos, como o gráfico np , são frequentemente usados para monitorar o número de unidades não conformes. As cartas de controle de atributos são consideradas mais simples, rápidas e baratas do que as cartas de controle variáveis (como o gráfico $\bar{X}$) porque não exigem a medição de alguma característica de qualidade; em vez disso, os profissionais só precisam contar o número de unidades não conformes em uma amostra. Por esse motivo, o gráfico de controle np também é utilizado para monitorar não apenas o número de unidades não conformes, mas também a média do processo. O gráfico de controle np_x foi introduzido por Wu et al. (2009)(WU et al., 2009) para monitorar a média de uma variável contínua usando inspeção de atributos. Os autores avaliaram o desempenho do gráfico np_x sem considerar o caso prático onde os parâmetros (como p), necessários para calcular os limites de controle, devem ser estimados. O presente trabalho tem como foco a avaliação de desempenho do gráfico de controle np_x quando os parâmetros são estimados. Apesar do fascínio inicial do gráfico np_x pelas suas vantagens percebidas sobre os gráficos de controle variável – como simplicidade, velocidade e custo-benefício – inconsistências nos resultados apresentados por Wu et al. (2009)(WU et al., 2009) são reveladas. Ao abordar essas inconsistências, oferecemos insights alternativos sobre a eficácia do gráfico np_x . Através de uma extensa investigação, envolvendo derivações e análise numérica, foram determinados os cenários em que os gráficos np_x bilaterais e unilaterais superam o gráfico $\bar{X}$. Com esse pano de fundo, agora com o gráfico np_x corrigido, foram detalhadamente analisados os impactos na estimação dos parâmetros. Verificou-se que o desempenho é afetado principalmente quando o desvio padrão do processo é estimado (casos KU e UU) apresentando-se significativamente diferente do que é nominalmente esperado se a estimação dos parâmetros não for levada em consideração na concepção do gráfico. O número de amostras de referência necessárias para atenuar esse efeito torna a aplicação do gráfico np_x inviável. Dessa forma, ajustes no parâmetros UCL e k_w se fazem necessários, tais ajustes foram investigados e mostraram-se eficientes, possibilitando que o gráfico np_x ofereça desempenho igual ou melhor ao gráfico $\bar{X}$ utilizando números de amostras de referência usuais. Esta trabalho contribui significativamente para uma compreensão mais matizada das vantagens comparativas de diferentes metodologias de gráficos de controle, para dados de variáveis e atributos.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Gráficos de controle por atributo; Estimação de parâmetros; Número médio de amostras; Taxa de alarme falso.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ATS	Unconditional Average Time to a Signal: $ATS = E(CATS)$
CATS	Conditional Average Time to a Signal
CFAR	Conditional False Alarm Rate
EQL	Extra Quadratic Loss
CEQL	Conditional Extra Quadratic Loss
Case KK	Case where both the mean and standard deviation are known
Case KU	Case where the mean is known, and the standard deviation is unknown
Case UK	Case where the mean is unknown, and the standard deviation is known
Case UU	Case where both the mean and standard deviation are unknown
SPC	Statistical Process Control
UCL	Upper Control Limit
IC	In Control

LIST OF SYMBOLS

$\bar{X}$	Sample mean
$\overline{\bar{X}}$	The grand mean of the m Phase I samples estimator
k_w	Coefficient
μ	Process mean
μ	In-control process mean
σ	Process standard deviation
σ_0	In-Control process standard deviation
Φ	Cumulative distribution function of a Standard Normal Random Variable
δ	Scaled shift of the mean
τ	Letra Grega Tau
m	Number of Phase I samples
n	Sample size
Y	Chi-square random variable
Z	Standard Normal Random Variable
μ	In-control process mean

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides context for the research by outlining its motivation, research questions, objectives, and the structure of the document.

1.1 CONTEXTUALIZATION

The quality of processes is undoubtedly of paramount importance in the field of business, so controlling and improving quality is an excellent strategy used by companies. The statistical process control area (SPC) provides a series of tools used to improve the process stability and reduce the variability. Control charts are one of the oldest tools in the area, used to monitor and detect changes in the process in order to keep it stable (AYKROYD; LEIVA; RUGGERI, 2019).

Processes based on qualitative characteristics, that is, by attribute, cannot be monitored with traditional control charts, as the popular $\bar{X}$, for example. In this cases, it is necessary to apply an attribute control chart: p , np and c are the most used to evaluate processes where the analyzed characteristics are difficult to be measured in a numeral scale (CASTAGLIOLA et al., 2014).

Monitoring processes through attributes offers advantages in terms of time and cost efficiency. Typically, the equipment required for attribute monitoring is less expensive than that used for variable monitoring. However, according to Montgomery, attribute monitoring is generally considered less efficient for tracking specific characteristics compared to variable monitoring, (MONTGOMERY, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to develop methods that enhance the reliability of attribute control charts for monitoring variable processes.

In 2009, Wu *et al.* developed an attribute control chart called np_x which employs an attribute inspection to monitor the process mean using a gage to classify the items as conforming or nonconforming (WU et al., 2009).

Due to the simplicity of the np_x control chart, many researchers have focused on its improvement. For example, Ho and Costa (HO; COSTA, 2011) examined the effects of wandering process means on the performance of the np_x chart. Sampaio, Ho, and Medeiros (SAMPAIO; HO; MEDEIROS, 2014) proposed a combined np_x - $\bar{X}$ chart to monitor the process mean in a two-stage sampling situation, where the sample is divided into two sub-samples: n_1 and n_2 . First, the sub-sample of size n_1 is evaluated by attribute inspection. If it is out of control, then the sub-sample n_2 is evaluated, and the mean is calculated. The process is considered out of control only if the mean exceeds the limit. For monitoring process variability based on the np_x chart, see Ho and Quinino (HO; QUININO, 2013), and da Silva et al. (SILVA; HO; QUININO, 2022b). Quinino et al. (QUININO; CRUZ; QUININO, 2021) proposed a control chart that combines attribute and variable inspections to monitor the process mean. In their method, the first sample undergoes variable inspection using the $\bar{X}$ chart, followed by k samples subjected to attribute inspection using the np_x chart. If neither chart signals a shift in the process mean, the cycle restarts with one sample for variable inspection and k samples for attribute inspection, continuing until a shift is detected by either chart. Additionally, Zhou et al. (ZHOU; YE; ZHENG, 2022) introduced the np_{CEV} chart to monitor the process mean using the conditional

expected value (CEV) weighting method. Da Silva et al. (SILVA; HO; QUININO, 2022a) proposed a control chart for monitoring the process mean based on attribute inspection with sequential sample sizes.

The concept of using an attribute chart to monitor a continuous variable, as proposed by Wu *et al.* (WU et al., 2009), has made a notable impact on process monitoring literature. This drew attention to the fact that all work carried out to date considered the process parameters as known. Typically, these parameters are unknown and must be estimated from m historical samples, each of size n , collected when the process is presumably in control. This is known as Phase I analysis in Statistical Process Control (SPC). For an overview of Phase I, see Chakraborti *et al.* (CHAKRABORTI; HUMAN; GRAHAM, 2008) and Jones-Farmer *et al.* (JONES-FARMER et al., 2014).

Subsequently, the chart's control limits are established using these estimates for prospective process monitoring (Phase II), where samples (also of size n) are collected at regular intervals h . These samples are classified as conforming or nonconforming using a gauge, for example, and the number of nonconforming units in each sample is compared with the control limits. If the plotting statistic falls outside the control limits, it indicates a high probability that the process mean has changed, requiring the manager to identify and correct the potential problem.

Most research on the development and performance evaluation of Phase II control charts assumes that the in-control process parameters are known. This assumption simplifies both the design and performance evaluation of the chart, as the run length (the number of samples until an alarm) follows the well-known geometric distribution.

In practice, however, these parameters are usually unknown and must be estimated during Phase I. When estimates are used instead of known parameters, their variability can lead to chart performance that deviates from that of charts designed with known parameters. For example, the run length no longer follows a geometric distribution, and the actual false alarm rate (FAR) may exceed the desired nominal rate. Frequent false alarms result in unnecessary costs, such as wasted time for managers investigating non-existent issues, which disrupts operations and reduces productivity. Therefore, when designing a control chart, it is crucial for managers to consider the impact of parameter estimation on chart performance to avoid unnecessary costs.

When designing control charts with estimated parameters, four cases are possible:

1. Both the in-control process mean (μ_0) and standard deviation (σ_0) are unknown. This situation, known as "Case UU" (Unknown mean and Unknown standard deviation), is the most common in practice and considered the standard unknown case.
2. The process mean is known, but the standard deviation is unknown. This is "Case KU" (Known mean, Unknown standard deviation), where the standard deviation must be estimated during Phase I.
3. The in-control process mean is unknown and needs to be estimated during Phase I, while the standard deviation is known. This is "Case UK" (Unknown mean, Known standard deviation).
4. Both the in-control process mean and standard deviation are known. This is "Case KK" (Known mean and Known standard deviation), the simplest and most desirable case. Here, the perfor-

mance of the control chart can be easily studied and measured since the run length distribution is known.

The np_x chart is commonly used in quality control to monitor processes over time. Using estimated parameters instead of true parameters can significantly impact the performance of the np_x chart. Estimating parameters introduces uncertainty, which can affect the chart's sensitivity to detecting process shifts and its overall effectiveness.

Building upon this background, the current study will explore the impact on the average time to signal (for both in-control and out-of-control conditions) and extra quadratic loss considering a shift range in the process mean for the UU, KU, and UK scenarios of the np_x chart. This research aims to elucidate the compromises inherent in these scenarios and offer valuable insights for practitioners in quality control, emphasizing practical considerations for real-world applications.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Clearly defined research objectives provide a roadmap for the entire research process, guiding decisions on study design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques (CRESWELL, 2008).

The general objective of this thesis is to investigate the effects of estimation of parameters (μ and σ) on an attribute control chart used to monitor the mean of a continuous variable.

In order to achieve the general objective of this research, this thesis has the following specific objectives

1. Review the available literature on attribute control charts used to monitor the mean of a continuous variable to highlight gaps in the literature;
2. Replicate the results of the control chart by attributes np_x to monitor the mean of a continuous variable.
3. Obtain the properties of the np_x control chart in the condition in which the parameters (μ and σ) are estimated.
4. Evaluate the performance of the np_x chart under the effect of parameters estimation;
5. Evaluate optimizing the np_x control chart considering the estimated parameters;
6. Propose future studies for the continuation of the study and contribution to the research field.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this research plays a pivotal role in ensuring the credibility and validity of the findings. As Creswell (CRESWELL, 2008) aptly stated, the methodology serves as the "blueprint" for the study, guiding the researcher in the systematic investigation of the research questions or objectives. By meticulously designing and implementing a robust methodology, this study aims to uphold the principles of rigor and transparency in academic research.

The initial stage involved conducting a preliminary examination of control chart literature to identify gaps requiring further study. Specifically focusing on control charts with estimated parameters, relevant papers were examined to understand the current state of research, including best practices, findings, and limitations from previous studies. Notably, it was found that no prior research had considered the estimation of parameters for np_x control chart.

Based on the initial step, certain decisions were made. It was presumed that the designed control chart would be utilized for normally distributed processes. The unconditional approach was chosen to estimate the process parameters (μ and σ), given its wide applicability and ability to represent a variety of users. Recognizing the estimated parameters as random variables following a normal distribution, the model requires adjustments to accommodate this randomness and the associated variability.

The effect of estimating limits on the np_x control chart's performance is examined separately for cases where either one or both of the process parameters, the mean and the variance are unknown. Precise formulas are obtained for the distribution of run lengths, the Average Run Length (ARL), and the extra quadratic loss (EQL). We assess these exact $EQLs$ and $ARLs$ across various scenarios. These findings offer practical understanding of how the np_x chart performs when parameters are estimated. Additionally, these derivations can serve as illustrative instances of probability and distribution calculations through conditioning.

The optimization of the np_x chart is also proposed. After the optimization study, an illustrative simulation study is presented to demonstrate the use of optimized parameters.

To perform all the calculations mentioned above, programs were written in the R language and are provided in the appendix section.

1.4 THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis is structured into six chapters. **Figure 1** shows the proposed thesis' structure and the alignment of the chapters with the specific objectives of the Thesis.

Chapter 1 presents the contextualization and research question, research motivation, research objectives, and the methodological release.

Chapter 2 presents the relevant theoretical background. The fundamentals of control charts and the types of control charts are presented. An overview of the literature on control charts with estimated parameters is also presented.

Chapter 3 presents the design of the np_x chart considering the parameters are known. The divergences on results and necessities corrections are also presented.

Chapter 4 presents the precise formulas for the distribution of run lengths, the Average Run Length (ARL), and the extra quadratic loss (EQL) for each cases where one or both parameters are estimated.

Chapter 5 presents the proposal for the np_x control chart optimization and an illustrative simulation example.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarize this thesis's main contributions and provide suggestions for further research involving related topics.

Figure 1 – Thesis Structure.

Chapter 1 – Introduction	Contextualization
Chapter 2 – Control Chart	Specific Objective 1
Chapter 3 – The np_x control chart with known parameters	Specific Objective 2
Chapter 4 – The np_x control chart with estimated parameters	Specific Objectives 3 and 4
Chapter 5 – The np_x control chart optimization	Specific Objective 5
Chapter 6 – Conclusions	Specific Objective 6

source: Elaborated by the author.

6 CONCLUSION

For the np_x chart when parameters are known, the results founded reveal inconsistencies with Wu *et al.*'s findings (WU *et al.*, 2009). The np_x chart requires a larger sample size than recommended by Wu *et al.* to match the performance of the $\bar{X}$ chart. Despite this, the np_x chart can be advantageous due to its potential for cheaper, faster, and easier attribute inspections in certain applications. Both one-sided and two-sided np_x chart designs can outperform the $\bar{X}$ chart, particularly with small sample sizes.

The np_x chart can monitor the mean more efficiently than the $\bar{X}$ chart, depending on inspection costs. Adjusting the sample size or sampling interval can enhance performance or reduce costs. Although the np_x chart's performance may not be as high as initially claimed by Wu *et al.*, it remains beneficial for monitoring a continuous variable's mean in some cases.

Parameter estimation proved to be detrimental to the performance of the np_x chart. The results revealed that the constraint of $ATS_0 = 370$ is not satisfied, and the EQL_{np_x} increases, indicating that the chart's performance has worsened. This effect diminishes as the number of reference samples increases; the more samples used to estimate the mean and standard deviation, the closer the performance will be to that achieved when the parameters are known. This makes the practical use of the np_x chart with estimated parameters unfeasible, as satisfactory results were only obtained when at least 500 reference samples were used.

The impact on the performance of the np_x chart is more pronounced for the KU and UU cases. The results showed that the mean estimate (UK case) has little effect on the variation of ATS_0 and EQL_{np_x} . In contrast, the process standard deviation estimate substantially affects both ATS_0 and EQL_{np_x} . Since in practice both parameters are typically unknown (UU case), it is necessary to adjust the control chart limits to optimize performance.

The optimization of the np_x chart involves adjusting its UCL and k_w parameters. The results have proven valuable, as adjusting these parameters allows for achieving equal or superior performance for the np_x chart when parameters are estimated, compared to when parameters are known, considering 25 reference samples — a commonly used value in real-world scenarios. Therefore, parameter adjustment renders the use of the np_x chart feasible.

In summary, our study sheds light on the performance and practical considerations of the np_x chart in comparison to the $\bar{X}$ chart. Our findings challenge previous research by revealing inconsistencies in performance expectations, particularly concerning sample size requirements. Despite requiring larger sample sizes, the np_x chart offers advantages in cost and efficiency, especially for attribute inspections. However, parameter estimation significantly impacts the np_x chart's performance, rendering its practical use unfeasible in many cases. Nonetheless, by adjusting parameters such as UCL and k_w , it's possible to optimize the np_x chart's performance, making it a viable option even when parameters are estimated. This highlights the importance of careful parameter adjustment in implementing the np_x chart effectively in real-world scenarios.

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