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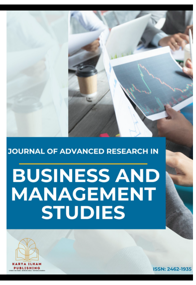
Journal of Advanced Research in Business and Management Studies

Journal homepage:
https://karyailham.com.my/index.php/arbms/index
ISSN: 2462-1935



AI-Powered Analytics for Sustainable Quality Enhancement: Re-positioning Statistical Quality Control in a Dynamical Business World

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 2 July 2025
Received in revised form 7 August 2025
Accepted 18 August 2025
Available online 25 August 2025

Keywords:
Artificial intelligence; statistical quality control; predictive analytics; quality management; real-time data; industry 4.0; machine learning; business agility

ABSTRACT

The modern business landscape is increasingly dynamic and data-rich, driven by the technological changes and demands for sustainability compliance. Traditional quality control approaches heavily rely on historical data and only detect problem after it has occurred. This reactive approach falls short in today's fast-moving and data-driven markets. This paper examines the transformation of SQC into an adaptive, AI-powered analytics framework that brings machine learning, neural networks, and real-time data analytics. This integration enables predictive and prescriptive decision making hence supporting sustainable quality enhancement. The paper posits SQC as a strategic enabler of sustainable quality enhancement, contributing to the quality management literature by redefining SQC as an intelligent, analytic-driven systems. This paper offers the practical implications and emerging cases and proposes directions particularly in the ethical integration of AI and cross-department adoption. These insights then highlight the need to reposition SQC as a key driver of long-term business agility, resilience and value in the era of Industry 4.0.

1. Introduction

Over the past century, quality management has transformed significantly from basic inspection routines into intelligent systems that drive both operational efficiency and sustainability. In the early 1900s, quality control relied on manual inspection to detect defects post-production. This reactive approach matured in the 1920s and 1930s with the emergence of Statistical Quality Control (SQC), pioneered by Shewhart and others. Tools like control charts and acceptance sampling shifted the focus towards reducing process variation which promote product consistency while minimizing waste and resource inefficiency. As industries evolved, quality gurus such Deming and Juran expanded SQC into broader quality philosophies centred on prevention, statistical thinking and employee involvement. These principles were further embedded by Total Quality Management (TQM), Just-In-

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https://doi.org/10.37934/arbms.39.1.184192

Time (JIT) and Kaizen, which brought quality management closer to sustainability through waste elimination, increased customer satisfaction and long-term value creation.

In parallel, the business environment has entered a new era of rapid evolvement. Today's business organizations are facing with intense competitive pressures, shifting customer's expectations, and the continued consequences of global economic disruptions ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) to the escalating impacts of climate change. The acceleration of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0) and the emergence of powerful Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are pushing business organizations to rethink their traditional workflows, restructure organization hierarchies to capture value from AI.

AI is no longer an option, it is inevitable. It is strategic imperative, as companies seek cost cuttings and improve scalability [1]. At the same time, AI is also enticing businesses to explore new models and services such as autonomous decision-making and intelligent process automation. The availability of smart assistants and AI-driven tools are already reshaping core business functions [2], although many organizations are still in the early stages of acknowledging these potentials. Obviously, there is feedback loop between the evolving business environment and AI development, each influencing and accelerates one another.

Sustainability agenda, too, has become central to business strategy. Organizations not only expected to deliver high-quality outputs but also to responsibly reducing environmental impact, conserving resources, and complying with social and regulatory demands. Driven by advances in AI technologies that enable real-time customer feedback and with the IoT devices and digital systems, have contributed to a data-rich environment that generate vast streams of data. These offer the opportunity to transform this data into actionable insights that support faster, more proactive and sustainable decision-making compared to the traditional quality tools can support.

This article explores how AI-powered analytics can reposition SQC as a dynamic, sustainability-oriented strategy. It addresses two central research questions: (1) How can AI enhance SQC to support sustainable quality management? and (2) What are the practical and ethical challenges of AI-SQC integration?

The remainder of article is structured as follows. Section 2 revisits the shifting paradigm of quality from traditional, reactive process towards real-time, predictive, and prescriptive analytics. Section 3 explores the integration of AI with control charts, emphasizing smart process monitoring. Sections 4 highlights how AI-driven SQC contributes to sustainability, while Section 5 examines its broader strategic value in quality and operational performance. Section 6 addresses the challenges and ethical considerations associated with adopting AI in SQC. Finally, Section 7 concludes by outlining future research directions and advocating for a more resilient, intelligent and sustainable quality management landscape through analytic quality leadership.

2. Repositioning Quality: From Reactive to Real-Time, Predictive and Prescriptive Quality Analytics

SQC has been a foundation of quality management since the early 20th century. Pioneered by Walter Shewhart in the 1920s, SQC introduced tools like control charts to monitor process stability and reduce variability, laying the groundwork for systematic modern quality improvement [2]. Overtime, methodologies such as Six Sigma and TQM extended the influence of SQC', enabling industries to enhance product reliability and operational efficiency. In sectors such as manufacturing and automotive, SQC has played a critical role in defect detection and compliance with quality standards, fostering customer trust and competitive advantage [4].

Traditional quality methods originally developed for industrial manufacturing, are inherently static, relying on historical data to monitor processes at fixed intervals. The post-production manual inspections and testing often were time-consuming and ended up with piles of scraps and wastes. The proactive Six Sigma and TQM methods were much based on statistical techniques and closely aligned with descriptive and diagnostic analytics, which summarized past data and help to identify the root cause of defects. Descriptive tools, such as histograms and Pareto charts, identify patterns and visualize frequencies of defects, while diagnostic tools like cause-and-effect diagrams and Shewhart control charts trace source of process variations defect. Control charts and acceptance sampling are typically used to detect quality issues after they occur, making these approaches inherently reactive and corrective rather than preventive. While effective in stable, process-focused environments, they primarily address internal variables. This retrospective orientation limits their usefulness in today's dynamic, data-rich and customer-driven markets, where business organizations must make rapid and informed decisions to remain competitive, responsive to ever-changing customer needs, and aligned with evolving regulatory, sustainability expectations due to environmental impacts. To remain relevant and competitive, they must adopt adaptive, analytics-enabled frameworks capable of supporting continuous, real-time responsiveness and sustainable performance [5].

The advent of Industry 4.0 technologies powered by AI has triggered a paradigm shift in quality management with the massive flow of real-time data from connected systems, sensors, and digital platforms. Whereas the traditional SQC, which was centred on passive monitoring and retrospective analysis, is now moving to intelligent, advanced analytics quality management and proactive continuous improvement. For example, the advent of Industry powered by AI has triggered a paradigm shift that enables real-time data flows supporting automated inspections and predictive analytics for enhances accuracy and efficiency [1,6]. AI in quality management introduces advanced computational capabilities that enhance the analysis, prediction and optimization of processes without explicit programming. Predictive quality analytics used data-driven approaches use data-driven approaches where machine learning algorithms like random forest and neural networks that infers the patterns and anomalies from historical and real-time data. Again, this enables prediction on quality problems before they actually occur, even under small sample constraints. The concept of predictive maintenance ensures very minimal down time and costs [6]. Table 1 presents the differences in reactive, proactive and predictive quality analytics.

Table 1
Reactive, proactive and predictive approach to quality

Aspect	Reactive	Proactive	Predictive
Defect focus	Defect has occurred	Preventing Defects	Predicting defects
Data use	Minimal historical data	Moderate use of historical data	Extensive use of historical and real-time data
Tools and techniques	Inspection, testing	Statistical Process Control	Machine Learning. IoT
Outcome	Defect identification	Defect prevention	Defect prediction and avoidance

Note: Adapted from Bussa, 2022 [6]

With the needs for high efficiency and accuracy, predictive techniques utilize machine learning (ML) algorithm trained over structured and unstructured data to unveil hidden patterns and insights that might be overlooked by human to detect pattern associated with defects. This would increase the speed and precision of the decision-making process. Anomalies recognition methods automatically identify trends or irregularities in sensor and production, supporting early intervention and root cause analysis are extremely popular in automotive and manufacturing environment [7]. AI significantly advances quality analytics through predictive and prescriptive capabilities, moving beyond the descriptive and diagnostic focus of traditional SQC. Predictive analytics leverages AI to forecast potential process disruptions. Prescriptive analytics, on the other hand, provides actionable recommendations by integrating AI-driven insights with optimization algorithms. For example, AI systems can recommend adjustments to production parameters, such as temperature or speed, to prevent defects, thereby enhancing efficiency and reducing waste [8]. These capabilities enable proactive quality management, contrasting with SQC's reactive approach of detecting issues post-occurrence.

When applied in the context of SQC, these AI-driven approaches fundamentally transform the way quality is monitored and managed. Rather than relying solely on historical inspection data or control charts, modern systems now integrate real-time analytics to detect quality deviations as they happen. In semiconductor manufacturing, for instance, ML models have been used to analyse production parameters in real time, has increased the defect detection system's prediction accuracies up to 15% [9]. The shifts enhance operational agility, allowing businesses to respond swiftly to market changes and customer demands while optimizing resources.

By repositioning SQC as a dynamic AI-enabled analytical framework, businesses can move beyond compliance-based control but towards sustainable, value-driven quality enhancement. This evolution shows that modern quality systems are expected to go beyond ensuring processes are stable, but it also need to be flexible, data-driven and responsive, and consider the need of people and environment. AI-powered SQC significantly improves rate of defective detections and response times. AI allows proactive maintenance by predicting machine defects before they happen (AI quality control tools, like convolutional neural networks for computer vision inspections) considerably strengthen fault identification precision while reducing material scrap [10].

3. AI-Augmented Control Charts and Smart Process Monitoring

Statistical Process Control (SPC) is one of the most powerful statistical tools to measure, monitor and improving products and process quality. Many recent studies gain interest in exploring AI adoption in SPC as a novel and more efficient process monitoring tools. AI-Augmented process monitoring combines traditional Statistical Process Control (SPC techniques with AI methodologies to improve the sensitivity, adaptability and intelligence of quality monitoring systems in manufacturing processes [11]. Augmented analytics automates data preparation, insight generation, and explanation delivery, empowering a broader range of users to interact with data meaningfully without deep technical expertise [12]. Augmented analytics, powered by technologies like machine learning, automates data preparation, insight generation, and explanation, empowering users to make better decisions faster. Machine learning and deep learning improve the ability to recognize pattern and diagnose anomalies in process data especially when dealing with large data-sets.

Proposed prediction control charts or known as pred charts adopt the behaviour of process median can predict continuous process outcomes [13,14]. These charts offer more robust and flexible alternative to the traditional SPC tools. Much earlier artificial neural network enables pattern recognition in control charts that helps in early fault detection before any effect on quality of products are detected [15].

The traditional time-weighted control charts, such as Exponentially Weighted Moving Average (EWMA) and the multivariate version of EWMA (MEWMA), have been foundational to SPC by monitoring process stability and detecting deviations [3]. These charts rely on fixed control limits derived from historical data. In dynamic data-rich environments where process conditions fluctuate rapidly, traditional can be less effective. Traditional control charts fall short because of its static control limits resulting in delayed response. The assumption of process stability which are rarely in the real case [16] hinder dynamic monitoring efforts especially in small-batch, high variation environment [17]. The integration of AI has transformed the static monitoring tools into adaptive systems capable of responding to real-time process variations [18]. Unlike traditional EWMA charts, which use static parameters to weigh recent observations, AI-driven models integrate ML based techniques such as Random Forest (RF), K-NN, and Support Vector Regression (SVR) to monitor shifts in the process mean vector for an adaptive multivariate EWMA control charts to improve small shift detection in monitoring industrial process mean vector [19]. Artificial neural network has earlier been proposed to improve the performance of monitoring general linear profiles by adjusting the MEWMA control chart as a base control chart [11].

AI enabled improved accuracy and efficiency of EWMA control charts by adapting to automated changing process conditions, optimizing the utilization of auxiliary information, and dynamically adjusting sampling intervals based on AI-driven insights. The direction of future developments in AI-based EWMA control charts could involve the incorporation of big data analytics for improved process monitoring, the integration of advanced AI algorithms for real-time decision-making, moving towards AI-driven predictive maintenance capabilities. These advancements in SPC entail a promising future for augmented AI control charts for even greater advancements in process monitoring and optimization.

4. Sustainability through AI-Driven SQC

AI enhances SQC by enabling sustainable practices that align with environmental, economic, and social objectives. One key benefit is the reduction of waste through early identification of process deviations. Traditional SQC methods, such as control charts, often detect issues after significant material losses occur, leading to scrap and rework [3]. In contrast, AI-driven SQC employs machine learning algorithms to detect subtle process drifts in real time, minimizing waste. For example, anomaly detection models analyse sensor data to detect anomalies in oil well sensor data that enable early detection of operational issues that can prevent losses and environmental damage [19].

Through predictive maintenance and anomaly detection, AI-driven SQC optimizes energy use, raw material consumption, and emissions. Predictive maintenance leverages AI to forecast equipment failures, scheduling repairs before breakdowns occur, which reduces energy-intensive downtime and extends machinery lifespan [20]. For instance, neural networks can predict motor failures by analysing vibration patterns, optimizing energy consumption and minimizing unplanned stops. Similarly, anomaly detection identifies inefficiencies, such as excessive energy use in production lines, enabling corrective actions that could lower emissions. These capabilities align with augmented analytics, which integrates predictive insights into operational strategies, fostering sustainable decision-making [7]. In summary, AI-infused SQC contributes waste reduction, resource optimization and alignment to broader quality and compliance goals, hence long-term sustainability and business agility.

5. Strategic Value of AI-Driven SQC

AI-powered SQC offers significant strategic value across industries by elevating quality management from reactive, operational tasks to a proactive and intelligent system that supports competitive advantages and organisational resilience. At its core, AI-enhanced SQC promotes efficiency, accuracy and overall product quality by automating data collection and analysis, reducing manual effort and human error. Traditional SQC methods have long focussed on monitoring process stability to ensure compliance with quality standards [3], but AL extends this foundation using real time monitoring, predictive analytics, and advanced data processing. Real-time monitoring and predictive capabilities allow for continuous process control and optimization. This leads to more efficient manufacturing operations, reduced resource consumption, and better response to anomalies [21].

In addition, predictive maintenance enabled by AI can forecast equipment failures before it happens, reducing unplanned downtime and extending asset lifespans which is critical for ensuring operational continuity [22]. From a quality standpoint, AI-powered SQC contributes to improved product consistency by reducing process variability and enabling early detection of potential defects. This fosters pre-emptive interventions that reduce scrap and rework [23]. Additionally, AI enhances cost efficiency by optimizing raw material use, lowering inspection costs, reducing inefficiencies across the value chain. On a strategic level, AI-enhanced SQC enables data-driven decision-making that supports long-term competitiveness and agility. Predictive and prescriptive analytics inform rea-time responses, aligning quality management with broader business objectives like sustainability, customer satisfaction and market adaptability [7].

Finally, the integration of AI-driven SQC into Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Quality Management Systems (QMS) further amplifies its strategic value. AI-enhanced ERP systems help to optimize inventory, production schedules and minimizing waste, while AI-enabled QMS platforms improve compliance with standards like ISO 9001, streamlining audits and certification processes [24].

6. Challenges and Ethical Considerations

The integration of AI into SQC introduces a range of technical and ethical challenges business organizations need to address. One of the foremost concerns is safeguarding data quality and integration. AI systems depend on datasets that are clean, structured, and consistent to enable accurate prediction and pattern detection, and anomaly detection. But, for many real-world settings, particularly for different departments and units, data may exist in different incompatible formats, suffer from inconsistencies, or contain missing data. Such fragmentations can hinder AI models from generating coherent insights, impairing their ability to interpret patterns or correctly detect the emerging quality issues [25]. Such conditions undermine the effectiveness and reliability of AI-powered SQC.

Algorithmic transparency and clarity are another challenge. AI systems often process sensitive data, such as customer feedback or proprietary production metrics, raising concerns around bias and risks of breaches or misuse [26]. It is important for the AI systems to be transparent, because when the decision making is unclear or hidden, it can reduce trust and makes it harder to hold anyone accountable. For instance, a lack of clarity in AI-driven defect detection may lead to undetected errors, affecting product quality [27]. This leads to broader concerns about bias and fairness. Over-automation and over-reliance on AI systems may marginalize human expertise, particularly if algorithms misinterpret complex conditions thus potentially leading to erroneous quality decisions [28]. Moreover, biases in training data can skew quality outcomes, such as prioritizing certain defects over others, disproportionately affecting specific product lines or customer segments. In quality control, this could mean undetected flaws in production for specific product lines or regions [5].

Organizational resistance to AI-based analytics remains a significant barrier. Many business organizations face cultural shifts, job displacement fear, lack the skills to operate AI-driven systems, leading to cultural and technical barriers [28]. For instance, a quality control team accustomed to traditional SQC methods may view AI dashboards as complex and untrustworthy. Involving humans in the decision-making process is important to help manage and reduce these challenges, hence, validate AI decisions, correct biases, and ensure ethical compliance [16].

7. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

Ultimately, the success of AI adoption depends not just on technology, but on how well business are co-evolving with people, processes, and systems with AI capabilities as such create sustainable value [2]. With machine learning, predictive analytics, and real-time monitoring, AI is advancing SQC into an intelligent, analytics-powered framework. This shift enables organizations to move beyond static control charts toward proactive quality strategies that optimize processes, prevent defects, and support environmental and societal goals. As such, AI-powered SQC is emerging as a key enabler of sustainable quality enhancement in today's dynamic business environment. The convergence of AI, advanced analytics and SQC redefines quality management as a catalyst for sustainable innovation. By integrating machine learning, predictive analytics, and real-time monitoring, AI-driven SQC enhances operational efficiency, reduces waste, and improves service quality across industries. From manufacturing to service sectors, AI-augmented control charts, predictive maintenance, and sentiment analysis dashboards enable proactive quality management, fostering resilience in dynamic business environments. These advancements support sustainability by optimizing resource use and minimizing environmental impact, as demonstrated by smart factories reducing carbon footprints by up to 15% [29]. However, challenges such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and organizational resistance necessitate ethical and adaptive approaches to ensure responsible AI adoption [16].

Looking ahead, the future integration of AI-driven SQC requires innovative and inclusive strategies to fully harness its potential. First, the adoption of low-code platforms can democratize AI quality monitoring, enabling non-technical quality teams to deploy AI tools without extensive coding expertise. These platforms simplify the creation of dashboards and predictive models, broadening access to advanced analytics. Second, cultivating an AI-literate workforce in quality departments is critical. Training programs focused on AI fundamentals and data interpretation can empower employees to leverage SQC tools effectively, overcoming resistance to technological change. Third, ethical AI frameworks are essential to ensure compliance and trust in quality management systems. These frameworks provide a safeguard against issues such as algorithmic bias, enhancing trusts and regulatory compliance. As industries continue to explore and adopt AI-SQC at varying paces, the evidence points to a transformative potential for quality management. By embracing analytic quality leadership where AI capabilities, data-driven insights, and human expertise coverage – organizations can hold more resilient, agile and sustainable quality eco-systems equipped to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and complex world.

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