Multi objective Taguchi optimization approach for resistance spot welding of cold rolled TWIP steel sheets

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Abstract. Formability and energy absorption capability of a steel sheet are highly desirable properties in manufacturing components for automotive applications. TWinning Induced Plasticity (TWIP) steels are, new generation high Mn alloyed steels, attractive for the automotive industry due to its outstanding elongation (%40-45) and tensile strength (~1000MPa). So, TWIP steels provide excellent formability and energy absorption capability. Another required property from the steel sheets is suitability for manufacturing methods such as welding. The use of the steel sheets in the automotive applications inevitably involves welding. Considering that there are 3000-5000 welded spots on a vehicle, it can be interpreted that one of the most important manufacturing method is Resistance Spot Welding (RSW) for the automotive industry. In this study; firstly, TWIP steel sheet were cold rolled to 15% reduction in thickness. Then, the cold rolled TWIP steel sheets were welded with RSW method. The welding parameters (welding current, welding time and electrode force) were optimized for maximizing the peak tensile shear load and minimizing the indentation of the joints using a Taguchi L9 orthogonal array. The effect of welding parameters was also evaluated by examining the signal-to-noise ratio and analysis of variance (ANOVA) results.

1. Introduction
The combination of strength and ductility of a steel is the most important property for the development of lightweight vehicles with lower fuel consumption and higher safety. As an advanced high strength steels (AHSS), Twinning Induced Plasticity (TWIP) steels with high manganese austenitic microstructure and high strain hardening capacity offer to fulfill this request. Early work on TWIP steels, which is discovered by Hadfield in 1988, was carried out late 1900’s [1–4]. There are numerous studies about microstructural and mechanical properties, effect of alloying elements, strain hardening mechanism, heat treatments etc. of TWIP steels [3,5–8]. On the other hand, suitability for manufacturing process is another important property which materials should provide. For the automotive industry, welding, especially resistance spot welding (RSW), is a mandatory process for almost all body parts. Consequently, welding of TWIP steels became a significant issue for usage in automotive industry. Some researchers investigated laser welding (LW) [9–12], dissimilar welding [4,11,13], friction stir spot welding[14] and RSW [15–19] of TWIP steels. However, the effect of the welding parameters on the mechanical and microstructural properties and the optimization of the welding parameters for TWIP steels is not well studied.
Almost all studies were focused on only load bearing capacity of the welded joints. But, not only mechanical properties but also indentation has a vital importance for automotive industry. In this study, a multi objective optimization approach was conducted using tensile shear load and indentation values for RSW of 1.3 mm 1Gpa grade and %15 cold rolled TWIP steel sheets. The mechanical properties of the weld were examined by means of TST and micro hardness tests. Effects of the welding parameters on the RSWed joints were discussed.

2. Material and method
In this study, as-received (1.3 mm) TWIP steel sheets were cold rolled %15 in thickness (around 1.1 mm) using cold rolling. All experiments were conducted on %15 cold rolled TWIP steel sheets. The chemical composition of the sheets used in this study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The chemical compositions (wt.%) and mechanical properties of %15 cold rolled TWIP steel sheets used in this investigation.

| Steel  | Fe  | C   | Mn  | Si  | Al  | Cr  | Ti  | Ultimate Tensile Strength (MPa) | Total Elongation (%) |
|--------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| TWIP Balance | 0.28 | 15.6 | 1.06 | 1.89 | 0.564 | 0.1 | 1220 | 20                              |

TWIP steel sheets were resistance spot welded in the overlapped configuration using MFDC resistance spot-welding machine connected to ABB robot arm and copper alloy electrodes having the face diameter of 6 mm. Prior to welding experiments, in order to determine the range of focused process parameters for RSW (welding current, welding time and electrode force), preliminary tests were carried out. The accepted criteria for the preliminary tests were the smallest button in peeling test and a maximum %35 indentation value.

Taguchi approach based multi objective optimization was performed using L9 orthogonal array and the parameter values shown in Table 2. First, S/N ratios were calculated separately for maximizing the tensile shear load (TSL) and minimizing the indentation values. In this step, calculated S/N values were normalized using the following equation:

\[
\text{Normalized } S/N = \frac{S/N_i - S/N_{\text{min}}}{S/N_{\text{max}} - S/N_{\text{min}}}
\]

where S/Ni is the calculated S/N ratio for the ith performance characteristics.

Then, the values used in Taguchi optimization were calculated by averaging normalized S/N values of TSL and indentation. To determine the relative effect of the parameters ANOVA procedure was also performed using the normalized S/N ratio values.

3. Results and discussion
The tensile shear load and indentation values of welded samples were presented with calculated S/N ratios in Table 2. The calculated heat input index values were also shown in this Table. Additionally, to determine the influence of each level of the response tables were calculated and shown in Table 3. Delta values of the welding parameters shows the magnitude of the effect on response values and rank values shows the order of importance of the welding parameters. Table 3 indicates that the most influential welding parameter was welding current. Main effects plot for the normalized S/N ratios plotted using the values in Table 3 (Fig. 1). Predicted optimum levels of welding parameters were also indicated using asterisk.
Table 2. Welding parameters and their TSL, indentation, heat input index values and S/N ratios.

| Sample No. | Electrode Force (N) | Weld Current (kA) | Welding Time (ms) | Heat Input Index* | TSL [kN] | Indentation [%] | Average of Normalized S/N Ratio of TSL and Indentation |
|------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1          | 1500                | 3                 | 100               | 600               | 4.18     | 1.39           | 0.522                                            |
| 2          | 1500                | 6                 | 250               | 6000              | 9.71     | 16.92          | 0.530                                            |
| 3          | 1500                | 9                 | 400               | 21600             | 10.54    | 35.21          | 0.475                                            |
| 4          | 2250                | 3                 | 250               | 1000              | 4.77     | 1.31           | 0.558                                            |
| 5          | 2250                | 6                 | 400               | 6400              | 10.23    | 12.09          | 0.623                                            |
| 6          | 2250                | 9                 | 100               | 3600              | 10.61    | 28.90          | 0.484                                            |
| 7          | 3000                | 3                 | 400               | 1200              | 3.96     | 1.67           | 0.463                                            |
| 8          | 3000                | 6                 | 100               | 1200              | 8.56     | 14.44          | 0.511                                            |
| 9          | 3000                | 9                 | 250               | 6750              | 11.61    | 29.55          | 0.527                                            |

*Heat Input Index = I²t/F (I: Weld current (A); t: Welding time(s); F: Electrode force (N))

Table 3. Response table for Normalized S/N Ratios.

| Means | Electrode Force | Weld Current | Welding Time |
|-------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Level |               |              |              |
| 1     | 0.509          | 0.515        | 0.506        |
| 2     | 0.555*         | 0.555*       | 0.538*       |
| 3     | 0.500          | 0.495        | 0.520        |
| Delta | 0.055          | 0.059        | 0.033        |
| Rank  | 2              | 1            | 3            |

* Optimum level

Figure 1. Main effects plot for the Normalized S/N Ratios.

According to Taguchi calculations, optimum levels of the welding parameters found to be 2250 N for welding force, 6 kA for welding current and 250 ms for welding time. Predicted optimum parameter set was not in the used orthogonal array, and thus, confirmation experimental test was required. To confirm the optimum levels of welding parameters, joining process was carried out again using predicted optimum parameter set and tensile shear load – deformation curves of selected samples having minimum, maximum and mean heat input index and optimum sample were presented in Fig 2. Obtained results of confirmation test were given in Table 4. The obtained maximum TSL was 11.61 kN (sample 9) with %29.55 indentation. Despite, %9.6 decrease in TSL, %59 decrease in indentation was achieved by optimization of welding parameters.

To determine the relative effect of the welding parameters and compare with Taguchi results, the standard ANOVA procedure was also performed using the normalized S/N ratios (Table 5). The most
important parameter defined as weld current with a contribution of 29.22 percent. The order of importance was also in a good relationship with Taguchi result.

**Table 4.** Experimental results of confirmation test.

| Electrode Force (N) | Weld Current (kA) | Welding Time (ms) | TSL (kN) | Indentation (%) |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|-----------------|
| 2250                | 6                 | 250               | 10.49    | 12.00           |

**Figure 2.** Tensile shear load – Deformation curves of selected samples.

**Table 5.** ANOVA table for normalized S/N ratios.

| Source                | DOF | Seq SS | Adj SS | Adj MS | F  | Contribution (%) |
|-----------------------|-----|--------|--------|--------|----|------------------|
| Electrode Force       | 2   | 0.0052 | 0.0052 | 0.0026 | 0.79| 27.51            |
| Weld Current          | 2   | 0.0055 | 0.0055 | 0.0028 | 0.84| 29.22            |
| Welding Time          | 2   | 0.0016 | 0.0016 | 0.0008 | 0.25| 8.57             |
| Residual Error        | 2   | 0.0066 | 0.0066 | 0.0033 |    | 34.69            |
| Total                 | 8   | 0.0189 |        |        |    | 100.00           |

4. Conclusions
In this study, RSW welding parameters of cold rolled TWIP sheet steel joints have been multi-objectively optimized using Taguchi approach. Also, the effects of welding parameters were discussed by means of TST and indentation values of the joints. The main conclusions can be drawn as follows:
- Optimum levels of the welding parameters found to be 2250 N welding force, 6 kA welding current and 250 ms welding time.
- The order of importance of the welding parameters was found to be: weld current > electrode force > welding time.
- The sample welded using optimum parameter set showed %9.6 lower TSL and %59 lower indentation than the sample which has maximum TSL.

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