Universidad de Costa Rica
EC3201 - Teoría Macroeconómica 2

Practice 1: The Cobb-Douglas utility function

Randall Romero Aguilar

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A consumer problem: 2 goods

A consumer gets utility from consuming goods x and y according to a utility function:

$$U(x, y) \tag{1}$$

The prices of the goods are p_x and p_y, and the consumer has available (nominal) income M. The budget constraint is therefore

$$p_x x + p_y y = M \tag{2}$$

The consumer wants to get as much utility as possible, given the market prices and his income. The Lagrangean for this optimization problem is

$$\mathcal{L}(x, y, \lambda) = U(x, y) + \lambda(M - p_x x - p_y y) \tag{3}$$

where λ is the Lagrange multiplier associated with the budget constraint. In the optimal allocation $(x^*,\ y^*)$, it must be the case that

$$U_x\left(x^*,\ y^*\right) = \lambda p_x \tag{4a}$$
$$U_y\left(x^*,\ y^*\right) = \lambda p_y \tag{4b}$$
$$p_x x^* + p_y y^* = M \tag{4c}$$

where U_x and U_y denote the partial derivatives of the utility function with respect to x and to y, respectively.

A Cobb-Douglas utility function

In what follows, we assume that the utility function takes the form of a Cobb-Douglas function:

$$U(x, y) = x^\theta y^{1-\theta} \tag{5}$$

and we define the price index P by

$$P\left(p_x, p_y\right) \equiv \left(\frac{p_x}{\theta}\right)^\theta \left(\frac{p_y}{1-\theta}\right)^{1-\theta} \tag{6}$$

where $0 < \theta < 1$.

1. (a) Prove that both the utility function and the price index are homogeneous of degree one.

   (b) Show that the marginal utilities with respect to the goods are given by

$$U_x \equiv \frac{\partial U}{\partial x} = \frac{\theta U}{x} \qquad \text{and} \qquad U_y \equiv \frac{\partial U}{\partial y} = \frac{(1-\theta)U}{y}$$

   [Hint: take logs in both sides of (5)]

   (c) Dividing (4a) by (4b), we find that in the optimal allocation it must be the case that

$$\frac{U_x}{U_y} = \frac{p_x}{p_y}$$

   Use this result to show that the optimal allocation x^* and y^* must satisfy the following condition:

$$\frac{x^*}{y^*} = \frac{\theta p_y}{(1-\theta)p_x} \tag{7}$$

   (d) Use (2) and (7) to prove that the demand for goods are given by:

$$x^*(p_x, p_y, M) = \frac{\theta M}{p_x} \qquad\qquad y^*(p_x, p_y, M) = \frac{(1-\theta)M}{p_y} \tag{8}$$

   Explain what this results implies.

   (e) Show that the Lagrange multiplier associated with the budget constraint equals the inverse of the price index, that is: $\lambda^* = P^{-1}$. To do so, you can follow these steps:

      1. Knowing that U is homogeneous of degree one, find an expression for $\frac{U}{y}$. The result should depend on the ratio $\frac{x}{y}$
      2. Use the result of step 1 to compute the marginal utility of y (see question (b)).
      3. Use step 2 and equation (4b) to obtain an expression for λ that depends on $\frac{x}{y}$.
      4. Finally, replace $\frac{x}{y}$ from step 3 with equation (7).

   (f) Use the previous result to show that the partial derivative of the Lagrangean with respect to the nominal income M equals P^{-1}.

   (g) Substitute (8) into (5) to prove that the *indirect utility function*[1] is given by:

$$V(p_x, p_y, M) \equiv U(x^*, y^*) = \frac{M}{P} \tag{9}$$

   (h) Compute the derivative of the indirect utility function with respect to M. Compare your result to that of question f.

   (i) Using (7), show that elasticity of substitution of the goods is given by 1. That is, prove that

$$\frac{\Delta\% \left(\frac{x^*}{y^*}\right)}{\Delta\% \left(\frac{p_x}{p_y}\right)} = -1$$

[1] The indirect utility function is a particular case of a *value function*.