

Econ 301: Microeconomic Analysis

Prof. Jeffrey Naecker

Wesleyan University

Budget Constraints

1 / 474

45 / 474

The Budget Constraint

- ▶ Last lecture: what the consumer wants
- ▶ This lecture: what they can afford
- ▶ The setup
 - ▶ Two goods: good 1 and good 2
 - ▶ Bundle $X = (x_1, x_2)$
 - ▶ Assume consumer also has income m
 - ▶ Prices p_1 for good 1 and p_2 for good 2
- ▶ Then the *budget constraint* is

$$\underbrace{p_1 x_1}_{\text{money spent on good 1}} + \underbrace{p_2 x_2}_{\text{money spent on good 2}} \leq \underbrace{m}_{\text{money available to spend}}$$

Properties of the Budget Set

- ▶ The *budget set* is the set of all bundles such that $p_1 x_1 + p_2 x_2 \leq m$
- ▶ The *budget line* is the set of all bundles such that $p_1 x_1 + p_2 x_2 = m$
 - ▶ These are the bundles that are just affordable
- ▶ What are the slope and intercepts of the budget line?

46 / 474

47 / 474

Interpreting the Budget Set Properties

- ▶ Interpreting the intercepts
 - ▶ Tell us how much of a good we get if we spend all of our money on that good
- ▶ Interpreting the slope
 1. Tells us the *market substitution rate* of good 1 for good 2
 - ▶ Eg if $\frac{p_1}{p_2} = 2$, can buy 2 units of good 2 if you sell one unit of good 1
 2. Also tells us the *opportunity cost* for good 1 in terms of good 2
 - ▶ Opportunity cost is the loss of potential gain from other alternatives when one alternative is chosen
 - ▶ Eg if $\frac{p_1}{p_2} = 2$, when you buy one additional unit of good 1, you are forgoing two additional units of good 2

48 / 474

Changes in the Budget Set

- ▶ What happens when m goes up?
- ▶ What happens when p_1 goes up?
- ▶ What happens when p_1 and p_2 go up by same ratio t ?
- ▶ What happens when m , p_1 , and p_2 go up by same ratio t ?

49 / 474

How The Government Affects the Budget Set

- ▶ Quantity tax: pay amount that depends on the quantity purchased
 - ▶ $p \rightarrow p + t$, eg $(p_1 + t)x_1 + p_2x_2 = m$
 - ▶ Example?
- ▶ Value tax: pay amount that is percentage of dollars spent on item
 - ▶ $p \rightarrow (1 + \tau)p$, eg $(1 + \tau)p_1x_1 + p_2x_2 = m$
 - ▶ Example?
- ▶ Lump sum: Amount taken from consumer that is independent of any purchasing behavior
 - ▶ $m \rightarrow m - T$, ie $p_1x_1 + p_2x_2 = m - T$
- ▶ Subsidy: the opposite of a tax, so just switch sign
- ▶ Rationing: a limit on the amount of a good that can be consumed by any one consumer
 - ▶ Effectively “chops off” part of the budget line

50 / 474

Budget Sets and the Real World

1. Two goods are often enough
 - ▶ Often we are just interested in the consumption of good 1
 - ▶ Let good 2 stand for dollars spent on all other goods: the *composite good*
 - ▶ Since this is already in dollar terms, $p_2 = 1$
 - ▶ Budget line in this case: $p_1x_1 + x_2 = m$
2. The numeraire good
 - ▶ Similarly, sometimes we are interested in prices and incomes relative to a certain good, say good 2
 - ▶ We call this the *numeraire good*
 - ▶ Rewrite budget line as: $\frac{p_1}{p_2}x_1 + x_2 = \frac{m}{p_2}$
 - ▶ Note that this is the exact same budget, just re-arranging formula
 - ▶ Prices are now in terms of the numeraire good rather than dollar terms

51 / 474

Putting Preferences and Budgets Together

Choice

- ▶ Preferences and utility: what consumers want
- ▶ Budgets: what is available or affordable
- ▶ These two concepts combine to tell us what people actually consume
- ▶ Guiding principle: consumers choose the best bundle that they can afford

52 / 474

53 / 474

Optimal Choice

- ▶ For a given budget set, the consumer should select the bundle in the set that lies on the highest possible indifference curve
 - ▶ Anything above this indifference curve is preferred but not affordable
- ▶ How do we find the location of this bundle in $x_1 - x_2$ space?
- ▶ Note that for well-behaved indifference curves the budget line is tangent to the indifference curve
- ▶ In general, does this tangency condition have to hold for a bundle to be optimal?

▶ More on necessary and sufficient conditions

54 / 474

Tangency Condition Visualized

55 / 474

Kinked Indifference Curve (Optimal, Not Tangent)

56 / 474

Boundary Optimum (Optimal, Not Tangent)

57 / 474

When Is Tangency Equivalent to Optimality?

- ▶ We just showed that if the utility function is differentiable (no kinks in indifference curves) and solutions are interior, then tangency is necessary for optimality (ie optimality implies tangency)
- ▶ What about the other way around? Does tangency imply optimality in general?
- ▶ However, if we have convexity, no kinks, and interior solutions, we are OK to assume that tangency is equivalent to optimality

Theorem

If preferences are convex, the utility function is differentiable, and we consider only interior solutions, then tangency of the budget set and the indifference curve is necessary and sufficient for (ie equivalent to) optimality.

58 / 474

Non-Convex Preferences (Tangent, Not Optimal)

59 / 474

The Tangency Condition

- ▶ The slope of the budget line is $-\frac{p_1}{p_2}$
- ▶ The slope of the indifference curve is $MRS = -\frac{MU_1}{MU_2}$
- ▶ So we get the tangency condition:

$$MRS = -\frac{p_1}{p_2}$$

or equivalently

$$\frac{MU_1}{MU_2} = \frac{p_1}{p_2}$$

- ▶ If this condition did not hold, consumer could trade with market to make herself better off
- ▶ Tangency condition plus budget constraint give two equations for two unknowns (optimal x_1 and x_2)

60 / 474

Consumer Demand

- ▶ Note that the solution for the optimal bundle depends on prices and income
- ▶ The function that relates the optimal bundle to these variables is the *demand* function:

$$X(p_1, p_2, m) = (x_1(p_1, p_2, m), x_2(p_1, p_2, m))$$

- ▶ Often we write (x_1^*, x_2^*) to remind ourselves that this is the optimal bundle
- ▶ Formally, demand is the solution to a *constrained optimization* problem:

$$(x_1^*, x_2^*) = \arg \max_{x_1, x_2} u(x_1, x_2) \text{ s.t. } p_1 x_1 + p_2 x_2 \leq m$$

61 / 474

Demand from the Lagrangian

- ▶ Lagrangian is $\mathcal{L}(x_1, x_2, \lambda) = u(x_1, x_2) + \lambda(m - p_1 x_1 - p_2 x_2)$
- ▶ First order conditions:

$$0 = \frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial x_1} = \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_1} - \lambda p_1 \quad (1)$$

$$0 = \frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial x_2} = \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_2} - \lambda p_2 \quad (2)$$

$$0 = \frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \lambda} = m - p_1 x_1 - p_2 x_2 \quad (3)$$

- ▶ Rearrange the first two equations and take their ratio to derive the tangency condition:

$$\frac{p_1}{p_2} = \frac{\frac{\partial u}{\partial x_1}}{\frac{\partial u}{\partial x_2}} = \frac{MU_1}{MU_2}$$

▶ Can also do with substitution of constraint

Examples

62 / 474

63 / 474

Cobb-Douglas

- ▶ Assume $u(x_1, x_2) = x_1^c x_2^d$. What is demand?

64 / 474

Cobb-Douglas con't

- ▶ Note by rearranging we get

$$\frac{p_1 x_1^*}{m} = \frac{c}{c+d}$$
$$\frac{p_2 x_2^*}{m} = \frac{d}{c+d}$$

- ▶ So fraction of income spent on each good is a constant

65 / 474

Perfect Substitutes

- ▶ What is the formula for demand for perfect substitutes in a 1-to-1 ratio?

66 / 474

Perfect Complements

- ▶ What is the formula for demand for perfect complements in a 1-to-1 ratio?

67 / 474

Appendix

Sidebar: Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

- ▶ Suppose we have the following logical relation between two conditions X and Y :

$$X \implies Y$$

- ▶ Meaning: if X holds, then Y will hold as well (though not necessarily the other way around)
- ▶ Read “ X implies Y ”
- ▶ We say that Y is *necessary* for X ; that is, Y necessarily holds if X holds
- ▶ We say that X is *sufficient* for Y ; that is, X occurring is sufficient for us to know that Y will hold as well
- ▶ If X is both necessary and sufficient for Y , then the two statements are logically equivalent
 - ▶ Written $X \iff Y$
 - ▶ Read “ X if and only if Y ”

◀ Back

68 / 474

69 / 474

Solving The Optimization Problem: Substitution Method

- ▶ We want to solve

$$\max_{x_1, x_2} u(x_1, x_2) \text{ s.t. } p_1 x_1 + p_2 x_2 \leq m$$

- ▶ First, solve constraint for x_2 in terms of x_1 : $x_2 = \frac{m}{p_2} - \frac{p_1}{p_2} x_1$
- ▶ Substitution leads to an *unconstrained* maximization problem:

$$\max_{x_1} u(x_1, x_2(x_1)) = \max_{x_1} u\left(x_1, \frac{m}{p_2} - \frac{p_1}{p_2} x_1\right)$$

- ▶ Take the *first order condition*, ie set the derivative w.r.t the optimizing variable equal to zero:

$$0 = \frac{du}{dx_1} = \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_1} + \frac{\partial u}{\partial x_2} \frac{dx_2}{dx_1}$$

where we have used the version of the chain rule for multiple variables

70 / 474

Substitution Method Continued

- ▶ Rearranging:

$$\frac{\frac{\partial u}{\partial x_1}}{\frac{\partial u}{\partial x_2}} = -\frac{dx_2}{dx_1}$$

- ▶ From $x_2 = \frac{m}{p_2} - \frac{p_1}{p_2} x_1$:

$$\frac{dx_2}{dx_1} = -\frac{p_1}{p_2}$$

- ▶ Combining we recover the tangency condition:

$$\frac{\frac{\partial u}{\partial x_1}}{\frac{\partial u}{\partial x_2}} = \frac{p_1}{p_2}$$

◀ Back

71 / 474