Recitation Notes on Kuhn-Tucker Theorem

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1 Optimization with Inequality Constraints

1.1 The General Problem

Let us introduce the general problem of maximizing a function under inequality and equality constraints. More specifically, we are interested in the following problem:

$$\max_{x \in X} f(x)$$
 s.t. $g(x) \le b$ and $h(x) = c$

Where X is an open set in \mathbb{R}^n , $f: X \to \mathbb{R}$, $g: X \to \mathbb{R}^k$, and $h: X \to \mathbb{R}^m$ are continuous and differentiable functions. These functions are multivariate functions that represent our constraints. More specifically, h(x) = c explicitly rewrites as $h_i(x) = c_i$ for all i:

$$\begin{cases} h_1(x) &= c_1 \\ \vdots \\ h_m(x) &= c_m \end{cases}$$

In practice, to solve this kind of problems, we often define the **Lagrangian function** of the maximization problem as

$$\mathcal{L}(x, \lambda, \mu) = f(x) - \lambda (g(x) - b) - \mu (h(x) - c)$$

$$= f(x) - \sum_{j=1}^{k} \lambda_{j} (g_{j}(x) - b_{j}) - \sum_{l=1}^{m} \mu_{l} (h_{l}(x) - c_{j})$$

and λ_j 's and μ_l 's are called the **Lagrangian multipliers**. We take FOCs wrt to (x, λ, μ) and we check a couple of other conditions that are formalized in the Kuhn-Tucker theorem.

^{*}These notes are partially based on recitation notes by Vinayak Iyer and Cesar Barilla.

1.2 Constraint Qualification

Before we actually state KKT, we need to first introduce Constraint Qualification.

Definition 1 Let X be an open set in \mathbb{R}^n , and let $f: X \to \mathbb{R}$, $g: X \to \mathbb{R}^k$, and $h: X \to \mathbb{R}^m$ be C^1 functions. Consider the problem

$$\max_{x \in X} f\left(x\right) \ s.t. \ g\left(x\right) \leq b \ and \ h\left(x\right) = c$$

For a feasible point $\hat{x} \in X$, the inequality constraint $g_j(x) \leq b_j$ is said to be **binding at** \hat{x} iff $g_j(\hat{x}) = b_j$.

We say that the **constraint qualification** (CQ) holds at \hat{x} iff the derivatives of all binding constraints

$$\left\{\nabla g_{j}\left(\hat{x}\right)\right\}_{\left\{j:g_{i} binding \ at \ \hat{x}\right\}} \cup \left\{\nabla h_{l}\left(\hat{x}\right)\right\}_{l=1}^{m}$$

in \mathbb{R}^n are linearly independent; otherwise we say that the **constraint qualification** (CQ) fails at \hat{x} .

We are going to understand better what CQ means when we introduce KKT. For now, we need to understand that in order to check whether CQ holds at \hat{x} we need to **derive** the gradients of the binding constraints at \hat{x} and then check that they are linearly independent. If that is the case, CQ holds. We are now ready to state KKT.

1.3 Kuhn-Tucker Theorem

Theorem 1 (Kuhn-Tucker) Let X be an open set in \mathbb{R}^n , and let $f: X \to \mathbb{R}$, $g: X \to \mathbb{R}^k$, and $h: X \to \mathbb{R}^m$ be C^1 (continuous and differentiable) functions. Consider the problem

$$\max_{x \in X} f\left(x\right) \ s.t. \ g\left(x\right) \leq b \ and \ h\left(x\right) = c$$

If x^* is a maximizer of the problem above, and CQ holds at x^* , then there exists a unique $(\lambda, \mu) \in \mathbb{R}^k_+ \times \mathbb{R}^m$ s.t. the following two conditions hold:

(1) First order condition (FOC):

$$\underbrace{\nabla f\left(x^{*}\right)}_{n\times 1} - \underbrace{g'\left(x^{*}\right)}_{n\times k} \cdot \underbrace{\lambda}_{k\times 1} - \underbrace{h'\left(x^{*}\right)}_{n\times m} \cdot \underbrace{\mu}_{m\times 1} = \underbrace{0}_{n\times 1}^{*}$$

(2) Complementary slackness condition (CSC):

$$h_l(x^*) = c_l$$

for each $l \in \{1, \ldots, m\}$.

$$\lambda_j \geq 0$$
, with $\lambda_j g_j(x^*) = b_j$

for each $j \in \{1, \dots, k\}$.

^{*}Note that this is a set of n equations - one for each x_i .

Notes:

1. The constraints $g(x) \leq b$ are actually a set of k inequalities i.e.

$$\iff \begin{pmatrix} g(x) \leq b \\ g_1(x) \\ \vdots \\ g_k(x) \end{pmatrix} \leq \begin{pmatrix} b_1 \\ \vdots \\ b_k \end{pmatrix}$$

and the constraints h(x) = c are actually a set of m equalities i.e.

$$\iff \begin{pmatrix} h(x) = c \\ h_1(x) \\ \vdots \\ h_m(x) \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} c_1 \\ \vdots \\ c_m \end{pmatrix}$$

2. The FOC is essentially for each $i \in \{1, ..., n\}$:

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial x_i} (x^*, \lambda, \mu) = \frac{\partial}{\partial x_i} \left(f(x) - \lambda^T (g(x) - b) - \mu^T (h(x) - c) \right) \Big|_{x^*} = 0$$
$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial x_i} (x^*) - \sum_{j=1}^k \lambda_j \frac{\partial g_j}{\partial x_i} (x^*) - \sum_{l=1}^m \mu_l \frac{\partial h_l}{\partial x_i} (x^*) = 0$$

3. Note that the term $\underbrace{g'(x^*)}_{n\times k}\cdot\underbrace{\lambda}_{k\times 1}$ is nothing but the expression :

$$\underbrace{g'(x^*)}_{n \times k} \cdot \underbrace{\lambda}_{k \times 1} = \begin{pmatrix}
\frac{\partial g_1}{\partial x_1} & \cdots & \frac{\partial g_k}{\partial x_1} \\
\vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\
\frac{\partial g_1}{\partial x_n} & \cdots & \frac{\partial g_k}{\partial x_n}
\end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \lambda_1 \\
\vdots \\ \lambda_k \end{pmatrix}$$

and the term $\underbrace{h'(x^*)}_{n\times m} \cdot \underbrace{\mu}_{m\times 1}$ is given by :

$$\underbrace{h'(x^*)}_{n \times m} \cdot \underbrace{\mu}_{m \times 1} = \begin{pmatrix}
\frac{\partial h_1}{\partial x_1} & \cdots & \frac{\partial g_m}{\partial x_1} \\
\vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\
\frac{\partial h_1}{\partial x_n} & \cdots & \frac{\partial h_m}{\partial x_n}
\end{pmatrix} \cdot \begin{pmatrix} \mu_1 \\
\vdots \\
\mu_k \end{pmatrix}$$

- 4. Simply, the Kuhn-Tucker Theorem states that if x^* is a maximizer and satisfies the CQ then there exists λ and μ such that (x^*, λ, μ) satisfies FOC+CSC.
- 5. What is the interpretation of the Complementary Slackness Condition? Remember that the multiplier λ_j is the marginal increase in the maximized objective function due to a slight relaxation of the constraint. The CSC simply says that if a constraint is not binding at the optimum, then if we relax the constraint a little, we should not be increasing the value of the objective function i.e. $\lambda_j = 0$. In a utility

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maximizing framework, if the Budget constraint does not bind at the optimum i.e. $p \cdot x^* < m$, then we are leaving some money on the table already. Now if we increase m, then our choice x^* should not change which implies that $U(x^*)$ is unchanged which in turn implies that the multiplier associated with the budget constraint is zero i.e. $\lambda = 0$.

6. In practice one writes down what are generally called the **KKT conditions**:

•
$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial x_i}(x^*) - \sum_{j=1}^k \lambda_j \frac{\partial g_j}{\partial x_i}(x^*) - \sum_{l=1}^m \mu_l \frac{\partial h_j}{\partial x_i}(x^*) = 0, \forall i = 1, \dots, n$$

- $h_l(x) = c_l \ \forall l = 1, \ldots, m$
- $\lambda_i \geq 0, g_i(x) \leq b_i$ and $\lambda_i (g_i(x) b_i) = 0, \forall i = 1, \dots, k$

Some Additional Comments Regarding Implications of the Kuhn-Tucker Theorem

- 1. It is **ONLY** a necessary condition and **NOT** a sufficient condition.
- 2. The Kuhn-Tucker Theorem states that if x^* is a maximizer and satisfies the CQ, then (x^*, λ, μ) must solve FOC+CSC. Hence we can find x^* by solving for all solutions to the KKT conditions. It does NOT however mean that if some x solves FOC+CSC then it is a maximizer.
- 3. The Kuhn-Tucker Theorem only works at x^* at which the CQ holds. If the CQ fails at x^* , then there may not exist (x^*, λ, μ) which satisfy the FOC and CSC even if x^* is a maximizer of the problem. So there may exist other feasible points at which the CQ fails which may also be maximizers.
- 4. When we are finding the solution to an optimization problem, we should find the solutions where the KKT conditions are satisfied. Call these **Type 1** solutions. We should also find all points at which the CQ fails. Call these **Type 2** solutions. Our solution is then found by comparing all these points i.e., **Type 1** + **Type 2**.
- 5. For **sufficiency**, if a point x^* satisfies the KKT conditions and the Lagrangian is concave, then x^* is a maximizer.

Meaning of CQ Note that the FOC implies that:

$$\underbrace{\nabla f\left(x^{*}\right)}_{n\times 1} = \underbrace{q'\left(x^{*}\right)}_{n\times k} \cdot \underbrace{\lambda}_{k\times 1} + \underbrace{k'\left(x^{*}\right)}_{n\times m} \cdot \underbrace{\mu}_{m\times 1}$$

that is, the gradient of f can be written as a linear combination of the gradients of the constraints.

First note that, by CSC, $\lambda_j = 0$ for those constraints which are not binding. More so, since the theorem states that a **unique** (λ, μ) exists, then it must be that the gradient vector of constraints which bind must be Linearly Independent. This is because we know from Linear Algebra that vector is expressed as a linear combination of some linearly independent vectors, then the representation unique.

2 Applications of KKT

Example 1

Consider the following problem:

max
$$xy + x^2$$

s.t $g_1(x, y) = x^2 + y \le 2$
 $g_2(x, y) = -y \le -1$

We will work through how to do it in a systematic procedure. The first thing to note is that a solution exists by Weierstrass' Theorem since the objective function is continuous and the constraint set is closed and bounded. Moreover, first note that the Lagrangian of this problem is:

$$\mathcal{L} = xy + x^2 - \lambda_1 (x^2 + y - 2) - \lambda_2 (-y + 1)$$

The KT conditions are then:

$$\begin{cases} \mathcal{L}_x = y + 2x - 2\lambda_1 x = 0 \\ \mathcal{L}_y = x - \lambda_1 + \lambda_2 = 0 \\ \lambda_1 \ge 0, \lambda_2 \ge 0 \\ \lambda_1 (x^2 + y - 2) = 0 \\ \lambda_2 (-y + 1) = 0 \end{cases}$$

Now we need to consider all the possible cases that we can have:

Case 1 - Both constraints are binding: When both constraints are binding we have $x^2 + y = 2$ and y = 1. This implies $x = \pm 1$. Let us first consider (1,1): from the FOCs we have that $\lambda_1 = \frac{3}{2}$ and $\lambda_2 = \frac{1}{2}$. Our first Type 1 candidate is thus (x,y) = (1,1) with $(\lambda_1, \lambda_1) = (\frac{3}{2}, \frac{1}{2})$.

Now we can consider (-1,1). From the FOCs, we can derive $(\lambda_1, \lambda_1) = (\frac{1}{2}, \frac{3}{2})$. This is our second Type 1 candidate. Notice that we still have to check for CQ, we will do that later.

Case 2 - Constraint 1 is binding and Constraint 2 is not binding: Now we have that $x^2 + y = 2$ and y > 1. From the CSC we have $\lambda_2 = 0$ so that $x = \lambda_1$. We can plug this in the first FOC and recalling that $y = 2 - x^2$ from the constraint, we get:

$$3x^2 - 2x - 2 = 0$$

Solving this equation yields $x = \frac{1}{3} \left(1 \pm \sqrt{7} \right)$. But since $x = \lambda_1 \ge 0$ it must be $x = \frac{1}{3} \left(1 + \sqrt{7} \right)$. This implies $y = 2 - x^2 = \frac{2}{9} \left(5 - \sqrt{7} \right) < 1$ which violates y > 1. Therefore, there are not solution candidates in this case.

Case 3 - Constraint 1 is not binding and Constraint 1 is binding: We now have y = 1 and $x^2 + y < 2$. We thus have $\lambda_1 = 0$ and thus from the FOCs $x = -\frac{1}{2}$ which in turn yields $\lambda_2 = \frac{1}{2}$. Our candidate in this case is thus $(x, y) = (-\frac{1}{2}, 1)$ with $(\lambda_1, \lambda_1) = (0, \frac{1}{2})$.

Case 4 - Both constraints are not binding: In this case from the CSC it must be $\lambda_1 = \lambda_2 = 0$ which implies, from the FOCs, that x = 0 and thus y = 0, contradicting y > 1.

Summing up, we have 3 Type 1 candidates. Our favorite candidate is going to be (1,1) since f(1,1) = 2 which is greater than both f(-1,1) and $f(-\frac{1}{2},1)$.

The only thing we have left is to check points at which CQ may fail. Notice that:

$$\nabla g_1(x,y) = \begin{pmatrix} 2x \\ 1 \end{pmatrix}$$
$$\nabla g_2(x,y) = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ -1 \end{pmatrix}$$

Notice that since none of these vectors is the 0 vector, the only problem we may have is when both constraints are binding and the vectors are linearly dependent. This occurs if and only if x = 0. When constraints are binding x can not be equal to 0 so we can ignore this points. Anyways, f(x, y) = 0 when x = 0 so it still couldn't be our maximizer. Thus, the unique maximizer of our problem is $(x^*, y^*) = (1, 1)$.

Example 2 (When CQ Really Matters)

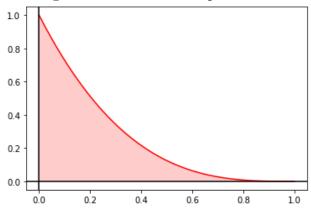
Consider the following problem:

$$\max_{x,y} x$$
s.t $y - (1 - x)^3 \le 0$

$$x, y > 0$$

The feasible set in this problem is the area underneath $(1-x)^3$ in the positive quadrant. This is shown in Figure 1. It is immediate to see that, under this constraint, the maximizer of out function is the point (1,0) - remember that we are trying to maximize the function f(x) = x.

Figure 1: Feasible set in problem 2



But now, look at what happens when we solve the problem using the Lagrangian method:

$$\mathcal{L} = x + \lambda \left[(1 - x)^3 - y \right] + \mu_x x + \mu_y y$$

so that our KKT conditions are

$$\begin{cases} \mathcal{L}_x = 1 - 3\lambda(1 - x^2) + \mu_x = 0 \\ \mathcal{L}_y = -\lambda + \mu_y = 0 \\ \lambda \ge 0, \mu_x \ge 0\mu_y \ge 0 \\ \lambda \left[(1 - x)^3 - y \right] = 0 \\ \mu_x x = 0, \mu_y y = 0 \end{cases}$$

What happens at (1,0)? We have that $\mu_x = 0$ from CSC. But now look at the first FOC - since $\mu_x = 0$ and x = 1 we have 1 = 0! The Lagrange method does not identify this maximizer.

Why? Because the CQ fails at (1,0). In fact, we have:

$$\begin{pmatrix} \nabla g_1(x,y) & \nabla g_2(x,y) & \nabla g_3(x,y) \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} 3(1-x)^2 & 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

At (1,0) the binding constraints are g_1 and g_3 and notice that $\nabla g_1(1,0) = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}'$ so that the derivatives of the binding constraint are linearly dependent. In other words, CQ does not hold at (1,0).

Example 3 (Envelope Theorem)

Consider the following leisure-consumption problem. Here c represents consumption with unit price p, l represents leisure that can be substituted for labor at wage w, T represents the total amount of time allocated between labor and leisure and I represents outside income:

$$\max c^{\alpha} \times l^{1-\alpha}$$
s.t $pc + wl \le wT + I$

$$l \le T$$

$$c, l > 0$$

The first thing to notice is that, at a maximum the non negativity constraints can not bind, else the objective function is zero, so we can focus on c, l > 0. Let us write the Lagrangian:

$$\mathcal{L} = c^{\alpha} \times l^{1-\alpha} + \lambda \left(wT + I - pc - wl \right) + \mu \left(T - l \right)$$

and KKT conditions are:

$$\begin{cases} \mathcal{L}_c = \alpha c^{\alpha} l^{1-\alpha} - \lambda p = 0 \\ \mathcal{L}_l = (1 - \alpha) c^{\alpha} l^{-\alpha} - \lambda w - \mu = 0 \\ \lambda \ge 0, \mu \ge 0 \\ \lambda (wT + I - pc - wl) = 0 \\ \mu (T - l) = 0 \end{cases}$$

It is also easy to se that the budget constraint must also bind at the optimum as one could always increase c for any given level of positive l and be better-off. Suppose that the only binding constraint is the budget constraint. We have:

$$\begin{cases} \lambda = \frac{\alpha l^{1-\alpha}}{pc^{1-\alpha}} = \frac{(1-\alpha)c^{\alpha}}{wl^{\alpha}} \\ wT + I = pc + wl \end{cases}$$

From these equations we get

$$c^* = \frac{\alpha (wT + I)}{p}$$

$$l^* = \frac{(1 - \alpha) (wT + I)}{w} \lambda^* = \frac{\alpha^{\alpha} (1 - \alpha)^{1 - \alpha}}{p^{\alpha} w^{1 - \alpha}}$$

which is feasible as long as

$$l = \frac{(1-\alpha)(wT+I)}{w} < T \iff I < \frac{\alpha wT}{1-\alpha}$$

in which case this solution is not actually satisfying the leisure constraint. If the parameters fit this case, then the optimum actually occurs at l = T, and c = I/p, where both constraints are binding.

Now, suppose $I < \frac{\alpha wT}{1-\alpha}$, so the solutions are the ones we found above. Suppose we want to show that the indirect utility function satisfies the Envelope Theorem with respect to I.

We are gonna write $c^*(I)$ and $l^*(I)$ to underline that they depend on the parameter I, but we could do this with respect to any parameter. The Envelope theorem tells us that:

$$\frac{\partial f}{\partial I}(c^*(I), l^*(I)) = \frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial I}(c^*, l^*, \lambda^*, I)$$

Let's check this. First, we derive the value function $v(I) = f(c^*(I), l^*(I))$:

$$v(I) = \left(\frac{\alpha (wT + I)}{p}\right)^{\alpha} \times \left(\frac{(1 - \alpha) (wT + I)}{w}\right)^{1 - \alpha}$$
$$= \frac{\alpha^{\alpha} (1 - \alpha)^{1 - \alpha}}{p^{\alpha} w^{1 - \alpha}} \times (wT + I)$$

so that

$$\frac{\partial v}{\partial I} = \frac{\alpha^{\alpha} (1 - \alpha)^{1 - \alpha}}{p^{\alpha} w^{1 - \alpha}}$$

We have found the first piece. Now consider:

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial I} \mathcal{L}(c^*, l^*, \lambda^*, I) = \lambda^* = \frac{\alpha^{\alpha} (1 - \alpha)^{1 - \alpha}}{p^{\alpha} w^{1 - \alpha}}$$

so we have cheked that the Envelope theorem works with respect to I.

Example 4 (Envelope Theorem again)

Consider the problem

$$\max_{(x_1,x_2)\in\mathbb{R}^2_{+\perp}} x_1^{\alpha} x_2^{1-\alpha}$$

s.t.

$$p_1x_1 + p_2x_2 \le m$$

where $\alpha \in (0,1)$, $p_1, p_2 \in \mathbb{R}_{++}$, and $m \in \mathbb{R}_{++}$ are parameters. We ignore discussions on existence and applicability of KKT and go straight to the solution.

Write down the Lagrangian

$$L(x_1, x_2, \lambda) = x_1^{\alpha} x_2^{1-\alpha} + \lambda (m - p_1 x_1 - p_2 x_2)$$

and then the KKT condition

$$\begin{cases} x \in \mathbb{R}^2_{++} \\ \alpha x_1^{\alpha - 1} x_2^{1 - \alpha} - \lambda p_1 = 0 \\ (1 - \alpha) x_1^{\alpha} x_2^{-\alpha} - \lambda p_2 = 0 \\ \lambda \ge 0, \ m - p_1 x_1 - p_2 x_2 \ge 0, \text{ and } \lambda \left(m - p_1 x_1 - p_2 x_2 \right) = 0 \end{cases}$$

By the two FOCs, we have $\lambda > 0$, and so by CSC we have $m - p_1x_1 - p_2x_2 = 0$. Also, comparing the two FOCs gives us

$$\frac{\alpha x_1^{\alpha - 1} x_2^{1 - \alpha}}{(1 - \alpha) x_1^{\alpha} x_2^{-\alpha}} = \frac{\lambda p_1}{\lambda p_2}$$

i.e.

$$\frac{p_1 x_1}{p_2 x_2} = \frac{\alpha}{1 - \alpha}$$

and so we have

$$(x_1, x_2, \lambda) = \left(\frac{\alpha m}{p_1}, \frac{(1-\alpha)m}{p_2}, \frac{\alpha^{\alpha} (1-\alpha)^{1-\alpha}}{p_1^{\alpha} p_2^{1-\alpha}}\right)$$

as the unique solution to the K-T condition. So $(x_1, x_2) = (\alpha m/p_1, (1-\alpha) m/p_2)$ is the unique type 1 candidate in this problem.

Because CQ holds at all feasible point, there is no type 2 candidate at all. Because the problem has a solution by Weierstrass, we know that the unique type 1 candidate

$$(x_1, x_2) = \left(\frac{\alpha m}{p_1}, \frac{(1-\alpha) m}{p_2}\right)$$

must be the unique maximizer of the problem.

We can rewrite The solution to the Kuhn-Tucker conditions as

$$(x_1^*(p_1, p_2, m), x_2^*(p_1, p_2, m), \lambda^*(p_1, p_2, m)) = \left(\frac{\alpha m}{p_1}, \frac{(1 - \alpha) m}{p_2}, \frac{\alpha^{\alpha} (1 - \alpha)^{1 - \alpha}}{p_1^{\alpha} p_2^{1 - \alpha}}\right)$$

The value function of the maximization problem is

$$v(p_1, p_2, m) = (x_1^*)^{\alpha} (x_2^*)^{1-\alpha} = \frac{m\alpha^{\alpha} (1-\alpha)^{1-\alpha}}{p_1^{\alpha} p_2^{1-\alpha}}$$

Taking its first order derivative w.r.t. (p_1, p_2, m) we have:

$$\frac{\partial v}{\partial p_1} = -\frac{m\alpha^{1+\alpha}(1-\alpha)^{1-\alpha}}{p_1^{\alpha+1}p_2^{1-\alpha}} = -\lambda^* x_1^*$$

$$\frac{\partial v}{\partial p_2} = -\frac{m\alpha^{\alpha}(1-\alpha)^{2-\alpha}}{p_1^{\alpha}p_2^{2-\alpha}} = -\lambda^* x_2^*$$

$$\frac{\partial v}{\partial m} = \frac{\alpha^{\alpha}(1-\alpha)^{1-\alpha}}{p_1^{\alpha}p_2^{1-\alpha}} = \lambda^*$$

From the envelope theorem, we have:

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial p_1}(x_1^*, x_2^*, \lambda^*, p_1, p_2, m) = -\lambda^* x_1^*,$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial p_2}(x_1^*, x_2^*, \lambda^*, p_1, p_2, m) = -\lambda^* x_2^*,$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial m}(x_1^*, x_2^*, \lambda^*, p_1, p_2, m) = \lambda^*.$$