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# Demand function with constant income elasticity

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Consider the following maximization problem:

$$\max_{\{h,c\}} u(h, c) \quad \text{s.t.} \quad rh + pc = y$$

where  $h$  and  $c$  are goods (housing and non-housing consumption),  $u(\cdot, \cdot)$  is a standard utility function,  $r$  and  $p$  are prices of  $h$  and  $p$  in dollars, and  $y$  is income in dollars. Normalize  $p=1$ , so that  $r$  is a relative price.

The FOCs of this problem yield the following optimality condition

$$\frac{u_h(h, c)}{u_c(h, c)} = r \quad (1)$$

where  $u_x$  represents the partial derivative of the utility function with respect to  $x$ . We represent this condition as

$$c = f(h, r)$$

where  $f(\cdot, r)$  gives the value of  $c$  for each  $h$  such that equation (1) holds.

Replacing in the budget constraint of the problem we have

$$rh + pf(h, r) = y. \quad (2)$$

A constant income elasticity function would be defined as  $\tilde{h} = g(r)y^\xi$  where  $\xi \equiv \frac{d \ln \tilde{h}}{d \ln y}$  is the elasticity. Can we obtain this function form in this problem?

Fully differentiating (2) with respect to  $\ln h$  and  $\ln y$  yields

$$rhd \ln(h) + f_h h d \ln(h) = y d \ln(y)$$

$$hd \ln(h) (r + f_h) = y d \ln(y) \implies \frac{d \ln(h)}{d \ln(y)} = \frac{y}{h} \frac{1}{(r + f_h)}$$

and using the budget constraint

$$\frac{d \ln(h)}{d \ln(y)} = \frac{r + (c/h)}{r + f_h} \equiv \xi$$

By definition,  $f_h = \frac{dc}{dh}$ . Thus, for the income elasticity to be constant we require a condition on the MRS, namely that

$$\frac{c}{h} = \xi \left[ r + \frac{dc}{dh} \right] - r$$

for any  $y$  and fixed  $r$ .