Advanced Microeconomics III

Mechanism Design

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Introduction

- Before, we consider a single agent.
  - We only assumed that the agent was making *optimal* choices.

- We are interested in applications where multiple agents have private information.
  - What can be *implemented* depends on our solution concept.

Social Choice Problem

- (Finite) set of individuals $i \in I$.
- Y set of alternatives.
- Θ_i set of possible types for i. Θ the Cartesian product.
- $\hat{u}_i(y, \theta)$ utility of agent i for outcome y and vector of types θ.

Social Choice Function

A social choice function is a mapping $f : \Theta \to Y$.

- Examples:
  - Bilateral trade.
  - Auctions.
  - Public goods.
  - Elections.
  - Etc.

- In the single agent case, $Y = \Theta \times \mathbb{R}$ and we split f in an allocation rules and a payment rule.

Mechanisms

- Consider an extensive form game Γ of incomplete information in which:
  - Players are privately informed of their types.
  - Each terminal node is assigned some $y \in Y$.
  - Players' payoffs at this node are $\hat{u}_i(y, \theta)$.
- Let σ be a (pure) strategy profile in Γ.
- Let $g(\sigma(\theta)) \in Y$ be the element of Y that is attached to the terminal node reached by σ when profile of types is θ.
- **Question**: which social choice functions can be implemented by games Γ, given a solution concept (i.e. when σ is required to be a NE, WPBE, or other.)

Overview

Dominant Strategies Implementation

Given an extensive-form game Γ, if there is a strategy profile σ such that for each $i, \theta, \hat{\sigma}_i, \hat{\sigma}_{-i}$.

$$u_i(g(\sigma_i(\theta_i), \hat{\sigma}_{-i}), \theta) \geq u_i(g(\hat{\sigma}_i(\theta_i), \hat{\sigma}_{-i}), \theta)$$

then σ is a *dominant strategy solution* of Γ.

- Omitting the condition that the inequality must be sometimes strict is standard in mechanism design.
- The appeal of this solution concept is that is completely "belief free".

Dominant Strategies Implementation

If there is an extensive-form game Γ with dominant strategy solution σ such that

$$f(\theta) = g(\sigma(\theta)) \quad \text{for all } \theta \in \Theta$$

Then we say that the social choice function f is *implemented in dominant strategies by* Γ.

- Γ is the *implementing mechanism*.
- f is *implementable in dominant strategies*.

Incentive Compatibility

- We say that f is *Dominant Strategy Incentive Compatible* (DSIC) if, for all $\theta \in \Theta$ $\theta'_i \in \Theta_i$ and $\theta'_{-i} \in \Theta_{-i}$,

$$\hat{u}_i(f(\theta_i, \theta'_{-i}), \theta) \geq \hat{u}_i(f(\theta'_i, \theta'_{-i}), \theta)$$

- **Claim:** if f is implementable in dominant strategies then f is DSIC.

Revelation Principle

- Consider the simplest possible game to implement a scf f.
  - Simultaneous moves.
  - Each player's action set A_i is simply Θ_i.
  - $g(\theta) = f(\theta)$
- This is the Direct Revelation Mechanism associated with f.

Revelation Principle

A social choice function f is implementable in dominant strategies if and only if f is DSIC.

- Sufficient to consider DRM.

Quasi-linear private-values setting

- Many applications follow in the next setup:
- $Y = X \times \mathbb{R}^N$ where
  - $x \in X$ is a non-monetary alternative.
  - $t = (t_1, ..., t_N)$ is a profile of monetary transfers.
  - t_i is the payment from agent i.
- Quasi-linear utility and private values:

$$\hat{u}_i(y, \theta) = u_i(x, \theta_i) - t_i$$

- Examples include auctions and public goods provision.

Quasi-linear private-values setting

- As in the single agent case, in quasi-linear private-values settings we can split the scf in two components:
  - $\alpha : \Theta \to X$ allocation rule.
  - $\tau : \Theta \to \mathbb{R}^N$ transfers rule.

- **Note**: in private-values settings θ_{-i} should be interpreted as the report by i's opponents.
- The pair (α, τ) also defines a direct mechanism.

Quasi-linear private values setting

- If dominant strategy is the solution concept, it does not matter for i whether reports coincide with truth or not.
- The solution concept is robust to any distributions of true types, so this does not need to be specified.
- A natural question is whether there are other things that can be implemented when we relax the solution concept.

Overview

Bayesian Implementation

- In a Bayesian environment, on top of agents, outcomes, types, utility, we need to define a distribution over types Φ, with density ϕ when applicable.
- We assume that agents are *expected* utility maximizers.
  - Uncertainty with respect to others' types and actions.
- Most commonly studies settings have the following features:
  - Types are independently distributed.
  - Quasi-linear utility with private values.
- We will consider these settings from now on.

Bayesian Nash equilibrium

- Consider a Bayesian environment and a mechanism Γ.
- A strategy for agent i is a map $\sigma_i : \Theta_i \to S_i$ where S_i is the set of strategies of i in Γ.
- A strategy profile σ^* is a Bayesian Nash equilibrium of Γ if

$$\sigma_i^*(\theta_i) \in \arg\max_{s_i \in S_i} E_{\theta_{-i}}[\hat{u}_i(g(s_i, \sigma_{-i}^*(\theta_{-i})), (\theta_i, \theta_{-i})|\theta_i]$$

Implementation

- A mechanism Γ implements a social choice function f if there exists a BNE σ^* of Γ such that $f(\theta) = g(\sigma^*(\theta))$ for all θ.
- Again, we are interested in Bayesian Nash equilibria of arbitrary mechanisms, but by the revelation principle we can restrict attention to DRM.
- A DRM is a pair (Q, t) where $Q : \Theta \to \Delta(X)$ and $t : \Theta \to \mathbb{R}^N$.

Bayesian Incentive Compatibility

- Let

$$\bar{Q}_i(\hat{\theta}_i)(x) := \int_{\Theta_{-i}} Q(\hat{\theta}_i, \theta_{-i})(x)\ dF_{-i}(\theta_{-i})$$

  - This denotes the interim expected lottery over X when agent i reports $\hat{\theta}_i$ and all other agents report truthfully.
  - Notice that the distribution does not depend on the true type θ_i. This is because of the independence assumption.

- Similarly, let

$$\bar{t}(\hat{\theta}_i) := \int_{\Theta_{-i}} t_i(\hat{\theta}_i, \theta_{-i})\ dF_{-i}(\theta_{-i})$$

  - This denotes the expected transfer from i that reports $\hat{\theta}_i$.

Bayesian Incentive Compatibility

- A DRM (Q, t) is *Bayesian Incentive Compatible (BIC)* if for all i and θ_i

$$u_i(\bar{Q}_i(\theta_i), \theta_i) - \bar{t}_i(\theta_i) \geq u_i(\bar{Q}_i(\hat{\theta}_i), \theta_i) - \bar{t}_i(\hat{\theta}_i) \qquad \forall \hat{\theta}_i \in \Theta_i$$

- Again, by virtue of the Revelation Principle, we will restrict attention to BIC DRMs.

Interim Individual Rationality

- A DRM (Q, t) is *interim individually rational* if, for all i, all θ_i,

$$U_i(\theta_i) := u_i(\bar{Q}(\theta_i), \theta_i) - \bar{t}_i(\theta_i) \geq 0$$

- $U_i(\theta_i)$ is the *interim* utility of type θ_i of agent i.

Payoff Equivalence

Incentive compatibility implies that

$$U_i(\theta) = \max_{\hat{\theta}_i \in \Theta_i} v_i(\bar{Q}_i(\hat{\theta}_i), \theta_i) - \bar{t}_i(\hat{\theta}_i)$$

Applying the Envelope Theorem

$$U_i(\theta_i) = U_i(0) + \int_0^{\theta_i} v_{i2}(\bar{Q}_i(\tilde{\theta}), \tilde{\theta}) \; d\tilde{\theta}$$

Revenue Equivalence

Theorem

Let (Q, t) and (Q', t') be two BIC mechanisms such that $\bar{Q}(\theta_i) = \bar{Q}'(\theta_i)$ for all i and θ_i. Then there exist C_i such that $\bar{t}(\theta_i) = \bar{t}'(\theta_i) + C_i$ for all θ and all i.

- **Note**: First price auction, second price auction, English auction, and Dutch auction generate the same allocation and give zero to each of the lowest type bidder.
- By revenue equivalence they all generate the same revenue to the seller.

Overview

Auctions

- Buyers: $i = 1, ...N$
- Single indivisible object.
- Buyer i values the object θ_i.
- Independent valuations: θ_i distributed with cdf F_i and pdf f_i.
- Seller knows F_i.

Auctions

- Auction setting:

$$X = \left\{ (x_1, ..., x_N) \in [0,1]^N : \sum_{j=1}^{N} x_j \leq 1 \right\}$$

$$u_i(x, \theta_i) = \theta_i \cdot x_i$$

Revenue Maximizing Auctions

In any linear-utility environment with voluntary participation we can pose the question:
Among all scf f that can be implemented with voluntary participation, what is the one that maximizes expected revenue $R(f)$?

$$\max_{f} \quad R(f) \qquad s.t. \qquad f \text{ is IC and } U_i(\theta_i) \geq \bar{u}_i(\theta_i)$$

Optimal Auctions

By the Revelation Principle we can focus on DRM.

- $q : \Theta \to [0,1]^N$,
- $\sum_i q_i(\theta) \leq 1$
- $\tau : \Theta \to \mathbb{R}^N$

$$U_i(\theta_i) = E_{\theta_{-i}}[\theta_i q_i(\theta) - t_i(\theta)] = \theta_i \bar{q}_i(\theta_i) - \bar{t}_i(\theta_i)$$

Where ...

Maximization Problem

- Choose the Mechanism (q, t) that maximizes expected revenue subject to
  - Bayesian Incentive Compatibility
  - Interim Individual Rationality
- (Seller's value for the object is normalized to zero.)

Expected Total Revenue

$$
\begin{aligned}
E[R] &= E_\theta \sum_{i=1}^{N} t_i(\theta) \\
&= \sum_{i=1}^{N} E_\theta[t_i(\theta)] \\
&= \sum_{i=1}^{N} E_\theta[\bar{q}_i(\theta_i)\theta_i - U_i(\theta_i)]
\end{aligned}
$$

Expected Revenue from single bidder

- By payoff-equivalence:

$$U_i(\theta_i) = U_i(0) + \int_0^{\theta_i} \bar{q}_i(s)ds$$

- So, (recall from the single buyer case)

$$\begin{aligned} E[R_i] :&= E_{\theta_i}[\bar{q}_i(\theta_i)\theta_i - U_i(\theta_i)] \\ &= \int_0^1 \left[\bar{q}_i(r)r - U_i(0) - \int_0^r \bar{q}_i(s)\ ds\right] f_i(r)\ dr \\ &= \end{aligned}$$

Total Expected Revenue

$$E[R] := E_\theta \left[\sum_{i=1}^{N} q_i(\theta) \left[\theta_i - \frac{1 - F_i(\theta_i)}{f_i(\theta_i)} \right] \right] - \sum_{i=1}^{N} U_i(0)$$

- Seller chooses the functions q_i and the constants $U_i(0)$ to maximize the expression subject to:
  - Monotonicity.
  - IIR.
- At the optimum, $U_i(0) = 0$ for all $i \in I$.
- All IIR constraints are satisfied for the lowest type by the envelope condition.

Ignoring Monotonicity

$$\max_{q\nearrow} \quad E_\theta \left[\sum_{i=1}^{N} q_i(\theta) \left[\theta_i - \frac{1 - F_i(\theta_i)}{f_i(\theta_i)} \right] \right]$$

As before, we

- ignore monotonicity,
- maximize separately for all $\theta \in \Theta$
- check if the allocation rule satisfies monotonicity.

Ignoring Monotonicity

$$\max_{q} \quad \sum_{i=1}^{N} q_i(\theta) \left[\theta_i - \frac{1 - F_i(\theta_i)}{f_i(\theta_i)} \right]$$

- The optimal q is:

$$q_i(\theta) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } VS_i(\theta_i) > VS_j(\theta_j) \ \forall j \neq i \text{ and } VS_i(\theta_i) \geq 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

- (Ties are not important.)
- This allocation rule is monotone if VS_i is nondecreasing.
- A sufficient condition (often assumed) is that hazard rate is increasing.

Properties of optimal auctions

- Downward distortions: the seller might inefficiently retain the object.
  - This happens when VS are all negative but $theta_i$ is positive for some i.
- For symmetric bidders with nondecreasing hazard rate, the allocation rule is efficient conditional on sale.
- For asymmetric bidders, the object might be allocated to a bidder different than the one that values the good the most.
- In the symmetric case, the optimal auction can be implemented by any of the standard auction formats (FPSB, SPSB, English, Dutch) with a reserve price.

Dominant Strategy Implementation

- The first price auction with an optimal reserve price maximizes, in equilibrium, the revenue of the seller.
- The same allocation and revenue can be obtained with a second price auction. However the equilibrium in the second price auction is in dominant strategies!
- Manelli and Vincent (2010) provide conditions under which scf that are BIC can also be implemented in Dominant Strategies.