



Applied welfare economics with discrete choice models: implications of theory for empirical specification

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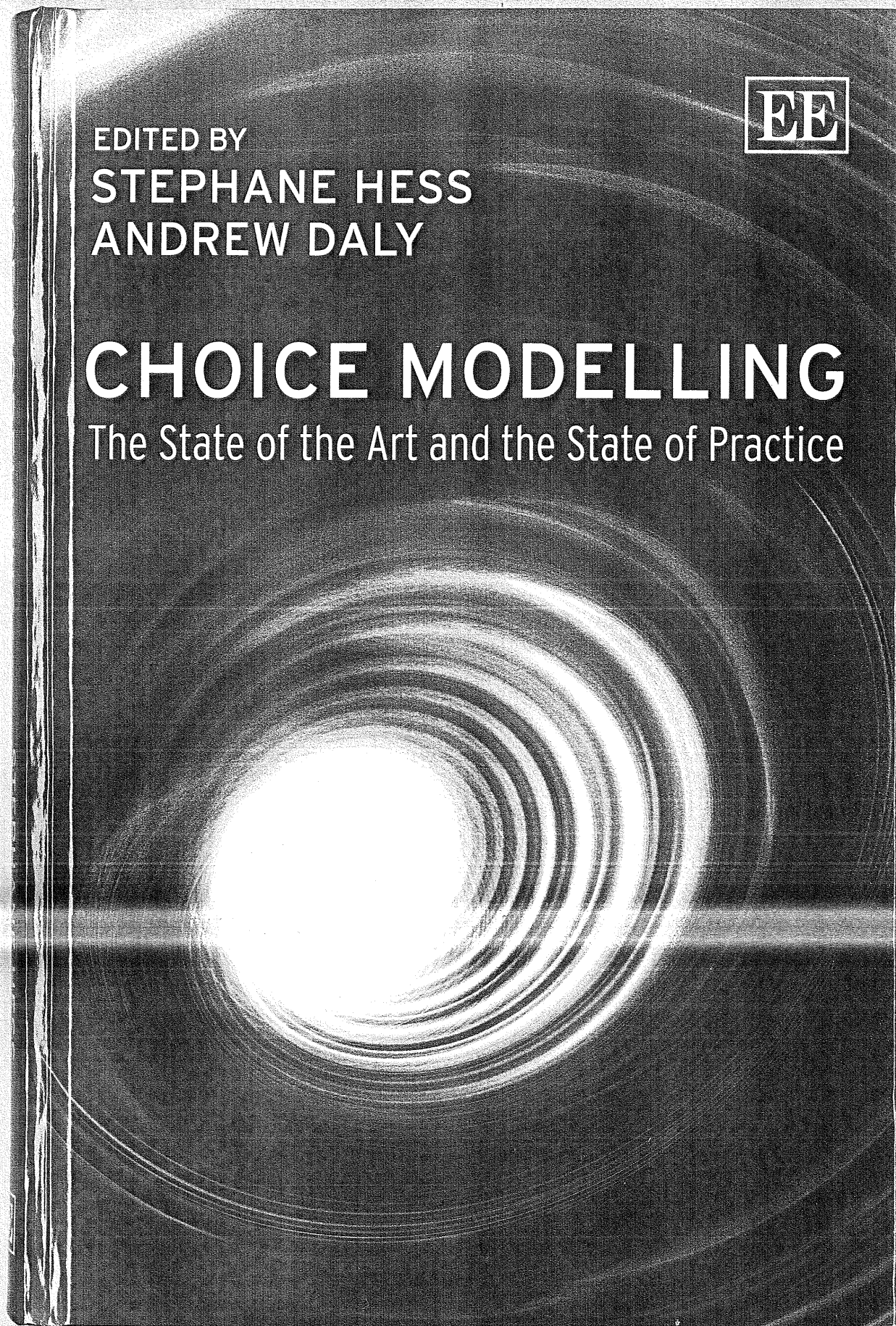
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CHOICE MODELLING

The State of the Art and the State of Practice



Choice Modelling

The State of the Art and the State of Practice

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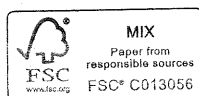
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Contents

List of contributors *Introduction*

1. Modeling single
the app store
Jordan J. Louv
2. Forecasting be
Andrew Daly
3. Workshop repo
discrete-contin
Abdul Pinjari, J
4. Workshop repo
Andrew Daly, J
5. Workshop repo
behaviour: stat
Benedict G.C. J
Harmen Oppew
6. Workshop repo
good models so
apace?
Rob Sheldon, M
7. Applied welfar
implications of
Richard Batley
8. A comprehens
rapid transit in
Annesha Enam
9. On the percept
using digital in
Paula Iglesias,
10. How urban en
choice and late
Lissy La Paix,
Andrés Monzó,

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	ix
1. Modeling single individuals: the journey from psych lab to the app store <i>Jordan J. Louviere</i>	1
2. Forecasting behaviour: with applications to transport <i>Andrew Daly</i>	48
3. Workshop report: recent advances on modeling multiple discrete-continuous choices <i>Abdul Pinjari, Chandra Bhat and David S. Bunch</i>	73
4. Workshop report: working with repeated choice data <i>Andrew Daly, Stephane Hess and Christine Eckert</i>	91
5. Workshop report: mental representations and discrete choice behaviour: state-of-the-art and avenues for future research <i>Benedict G.C. Dellaert, Theo Arentze, Caspar G. Chorus, Harmen Oppewal and Geert Wets</i>	107
6. Workshop report: good data is key to the development of good models so how is innovation in data collection keeping apace? <i>Rob Sheldon, Martin Dix, Terry Flynn and Paul Metcalfe</i>	125
7. Applied welfare economics with discrete choice models: implications of theory for empirical specification <i>Richard Batley and J. Nicolás Ibáñez</i>	144
8. A comprehensive model to capture the preference for mass rapid transit in Dhaka <i>Annesha Enam and Charisma F. Choudhury</i>	172
9. On the perception of safety in low income neighbourhoods: using digital images in a stated choice experiment <i>Paula Iglesias, Margarita Greene and Juan de Dios Ortúzar</i>	193
10. How urban environment affects travel behaviour: integrated choice and latent variable model for travel schedules <i>Lissy La Paix, Michel Bierlaire, Elisabetta Cherchi and Andrés Monzón</i>	211

11. Selecting a date: a matter of regret and compromises 229
Caspar G. Chorus and John M. Rose
12. Trivariate probit models of pre-purchase/purchase shopping
channel choice: clothing purchases in Northern California 243
Patricia L. Mokhtarian and Wei (Laura) Tang
13. Choice models of travel demand in practice: current trends,
problems and welcome research directions 274
Peter Vovsha

Index

303

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Stephane Hess Inst

promises	229
urchase shopping hern California	243
ang	
e: current trends,	274
	303

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7. Applied welfare economics with discrete choice models: implications of theory for empirical specification

Richard Batley and J. Nicolás Ibáñez

1. INTRODUCTION

The apparatus of the Random Utility Model (RUM) first emerged in the early 1960s, with Marschak (1960) and Block and Marschak (1960) translating models originally developed for discriminant analysis in psychophysics (Thurstone, 1927) to the alternative domain of discrete choice analysis in economics. Whilst some researchers were quick to see its practical potential (e.g. McFadden, 1968, 1975), it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that RUM was equipped with a reasonably comprehensive theoretical rationale in terms of the economics of consumption. An important tenet of this rationale was the link between discrete choice and welfare, which established a basis for applying RUM to public policy analysis, and paved the way for the plethora of applications which have been witnessed over the last 30 years.

It will be helpful to clarify precisely what we mean by 'discrete choice', since Small and Rosen (1981) – which will be referred to as 'S&R' in the remainder of this chapter – suggest three alternative rationales, as follows. First, commodities may be available in continuous quantities but only a limited number of varieties. Second, goods may be supplied in discrete units of such magnitude that only a small number of those units are typically consumed (in this case, S&R cite the example of travel mode choice). Third, if the search for the optimal consumption bundle entails a choice between alternative corner solutions, then the problem is reduced to discrete units. S&R draw particular motivation from the first rationale, introducing a general model of demand comprising both continuous and discrete components. That is to say, an individual is represented as choosing a quantity of a continuous commodity conditional upon discrete choice.

Whilst not overlooking the significant contributions of McFadden

(1981) and Williams (1981) influential in establishing that RUM can be applied to welfare [their] paper is to demonstrate that welfare economics can be applied where choices are involved' (S&R, 1981). 'Throughout, the emphasis is on empirical work' (S&R, 1981) with which RUM has been shown to have stood the test of time; unchallenged and continuing to inform policy interventions.

That said, in the years since its publication the literature (e.g. Hau, 1981; 1990; Karlström, 1999; 2000) has shown the properties of the consumer surplus. In particular, these contradictions have been admitted income effects of the surplus. This will seek to contribute to the understanding of S&R, especially in the context of the provide '... rigorous guidance. Specifically, our chapter will

1. Section 2 will introduce the demand, before articulating the function, and exposing the underlying theory.
2. Section 3 will consider the discrete and continuous components of individual-level and aggregate demand. This chapter will present the derivation of S&R's demand function.
3. Sections 4 and 5 will consider the demand with four components: 'adding up', 'a restricted case of demand', the chapter will present the specification, such that the demand function is derived.
4. Finally, section 6 will consider the consumer surplus that the 'log sum' method provides. It will discuss the requirements on the method for the fundamental properties of the consumer surplus.

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(1981) and Williams (1977), S&R's analysis has proved particularly influential in establishing a basis upon which discrete choice models can be applied to welfare economics. S&R state that 'The purpose of [their] paper is to demonstrate that the conventional methods of applied welfare economics can be generalised to handle cases in which discrete choices are involved' (S&R, 1981, p. 106). Furthermore, they remark that: 'Throughout, the emphasis is on providing rigorous guidelines for carrying out empirical work' (p. 106). It is notable that, despite the intensity with which RUM has been applied over the last 30 years, S&R's paper has stood the test of time; the key propositions of the paper remain largely unchallenged and continue to underpin the analysis of significant public policy interventions.

That said, in the years following its publication, a small but significant literature (e.g. Hau, 1985, 1987; Jara-Díaz and Farah, 1988; Jara-Díaz, 1990; Karlström, 1999; Karlström and Morey, 2004) has clarified the properties of the consumer surplus measure emanating from S&R's paper. In particular, these contributors have considered the extent to which S&R admits income effects of both price and income changes. The present paper will seek to contribute to the aforementioned literature by furthering understanding of S&R, especially in a manner that appeals to the aspiration to provide '... rigorous guidelines for carrying out empirical work'. More specifically, our chapter will offer four substantive contributions, as follows:

1. Section 2 will introduce S&R's problem of discrete-continuous demand, before articulating the concept of a probabilistic demand function, and exposing the assumptions underlying this concept.
2. Section 3 will consider the application of the Slutsky equation to the discrete and continuous components of demand, from both individual-level and aggregate perspectives. In this regard, the present chapter will present a definitive account of the assumptions underpinning S&R's derivation of the Slutsky equation.
3. Sections 4 and 5 will reconcile S&R's model of discrete-continuous demand with four fundamental properties of demand functions, namely 'adding up', 'negativity', 'homogeneity' and 'symmetry'. For a restricted case of S&R's model involving only the probabilistic demand, the chapter will identify particular requirements on model specification, such that the aforementioned properties hold.
4. Finally, section 6 will review the rationale followed by S&R in deriving consumer surplus from discrete choice models. It will be shown that the 'log sum' measure of consumer surplus implies very particular requirements on model specification, consistent with those supporting the fundamental properties of demand functions.

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