

Deriving the Lerner index for a monopoly

Let's assume a monopolist with a cost function $C(q)$ facing a market demand $q = D(p)$. To maximize profits, he sets an optimal price p^m (a monopoly can choose either price or quantity as decision variable).

$$\max_p pq - C(q) = pD(p) - C(D(p))$$

gives us the first order condition

$$1D(p^m) + p^m D'(p^m) - C'(D(p^m))D'(p^m) = 0.$$

Dividing this by $p^m D'(p^m)$ and arranging gives us

$$\frac{p^m - C'(D(p^m))}{p^m} = -\frac{D(p^m)1}{D'(p^m)p^m}. \text{ But the demand's price elasticity}$$

$$\text{is } \eta = -\frac{\frac{dD(p)}{D(p)}}{\frac{dp}{p}} = -\frac{dD(p)p}{dpD(p)}.$$

$$\text{Noticing that } dp = 1, \text{ we get } \frac{1}{\eta} = -\frac{D(p)}{D'(p)p}. \quad \text{So}$$

$$\frac{p^m - C'(D(p^m))}{p^m} = \frac{1}{\eta}$$