Review of: "On Mask Wearing in Environments With and Without a Mask Mandate"

Robert Sonora[1]

1 University of Montana

I think this a decent start for a potentially interesting question with a lot of possible applications. My suggestions fall into two categories: theoretical modelling and "implementability" or usefulness.

First, the primary shortcoming I see is that, while the model is very simple in form, it doesn't really capture the true nature, hence it's a first step. I understand the "model" -- or should I say the utility functions? -- , is very stylized to keep the results clean, I don't think it does much to truly answer the question. The author states that having α be the same for each participant is a necessary component for maintaining simplicity, but it is unrealistic and I wondered why it's even there. There author adds the α "modifiers" θ and γ, which I think are useful and we would potentially see result flip if the appropriate assumptions about these two preference parameters were included in the analysis.

Next, there is no cost associated with the mask wearing. If the cost of masks were 0, might they non-maskers adopt the mask? If the costs of masks prohibitively high, would the maskers use them? How would those costs figure into the Coase solution?

Mask wearing is effectively a public good with positive externalities. Not being an expert on the Coase theorem, I wonder if a Coasian solution is appropriate to use for public goods. And does the nature of public goods change Coasian price?

My next concern is how useful is this "in real life". I wonder if a more relevant way to approach this is using some sort of utility maximizing reaction function, whereby the two groups interact and come up with an optimal h^*. You could introduce property rights by defining the Stackelberg leader, with the result being

$$h_{NM}^* > h_M^*$$

depending on who is the leader. Out of this bargain, I suspect you would get a similar bargaining price to the Coase solution.