

Extended Market Games in Technology Sectors: Microchip Manufacturing Case Study

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Abstract

This paper extends previous research on one-commodity market games by applying the cooperative approach to technology-intensive sectors, with a specific focus on the microchip manufacturing industry. We introduce two new theoretical results that enhance our understanding of price stability in oligopolistic markets characterized by high entry barriers and substantial R&D investments. First, we establish the existence of a modified pseudo-core under weakened assumptions about demand elasticity. Second, we demonstrate the convergence of coalition-based pricing strategies in dynamic market conditions. These theoretical advances are validated through a case study of the semiconductor industry, where several manufacturers trade standardized microchips while negotiating prices among coalitions. The empirical findings suggest that cooperative game theory provides valuable insights into pricing stability in technology markets, especially during periods of supply chain disruption.

Mathematics Subject Classification: 91A12, 91B24, 91B38

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1 Introduction

In previous work [5], it has been explored the application of cooperative game theory to markets with several agents trading a single commodity. That study

established the concept of a pseudo-core as a solution for price stability and proved an existence result under specific conditions related to demand elasticity and value functions. The current paper extends those findings to address markets with unique characteristics found in technology-intensive sectors, particularly the semiconductor industry.

The microchip manufacturing sector presents an ideal context for the application of cooperative game theory due to several distinctive features. First, despite product differentiation, standardized microchips within specific categories (such as general-purpose microcontrollers or memory chips) can be considered largely homogeneous commodities traded by multiple manufacturers. Second, the industry is characterized by significant entry barriers, substantial R&D investments, and production capacity constraints that motivate cooperative behavior among ostensible competitors. Third, recent global supply chain disruptions have created unusual market dynamics warranting theoretical examination.

Our extended model incorporates these industry-specific features while maintaining the cooperative framework introduced in [5]. The key theoretical contributions include: (1) a generalization of the pseudo-core concept to accommodate technology markets with shifting demand patterns, and (2) new convergence results for coalition-based pricing strategies under dynamic market conditions. We validate these theoretical advances through an industry case study focusing on microchip manufacturers during the 2020-2023 period.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the basic model developed in [5] and introduces the extensions required for technology-intensive markets. Section 3 presents two new theoretical results concerning the existence of stable price systems under modified conditions. Section 4 applies the extended model to the microchip manufacturing industry, presenting empirical findings that support our theoretical results. Section 5 concludes with implications for both theory development and industry practice.

2 Extended Model for Technology Markets

2.1 Review of the Basic Model

We begin by recalling the key elements of the one-commodity market game introduced in [5]. The triple $G = (N, d, v)$ represents a market where:

- $N = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$ denotes the set of agents (manufacturers);
- $p \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$ is a system of prices where p_i is the price charged by agent i for one unit of the commodity;

- $d : \mathbb{R}_+^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_+^n$ is a demand function, where $d_i(p)$ represents the amount of the commodity purchased from agent i when the price system is p ;
- $v : \mathbb{R}_+^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ denotes the value function, where $v(x)$ represents the market value of demand x , including investments, costs, and expected profit.

In this framework, a stable system of prices p^* satisfies:

$$\langle p^*, d(p^*) \rangle = v(d(p^*)) \quad (1)$$

There are no $p \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$ and $\emptyset \neq S \subseteq N$ such that:

$$p_S < p_S^*, \quad p_{\bar{S}} = p_{\bar{S}}^* \quad (2)$$

$$\langle p_S, d_S(p) \rangle \geq v(\hat{d}_S(p)) \quad (3)$$

The pseudo-core of G was defined as the set of price systems satisfying conditions (1), (2), and (3).

2.2 Extensions for Technology Markets

To adapt the model to technology-intensive sectors, particularly the microchip industry, we introduce several extensions:

Definition 2.1 *A time-varying one-commodity market game is defined as $G' = (N, d^t, v, \theta, c, C)$ where:*

- $d^t : \mathbb{R}_+^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_+^n$ is a time-dependent demand function with $t \in [0, T]$;
- $\theta \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$ represents the R&D investment vector, where θ_i is the investment of agent i ;
- $c, C \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$ are vectors of minimum and maximum production capacities, respectively.

The extended value function v now depends on both demand and R&D investment: $v : \mathbb{R}_+^n \times \mathbb{R}_+^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$.

2.3 Modified Stability Conditions

In this extended framework, we redefine the concept of stability to account for the dynamic nature of technology markets.

Definition 2.2 A price system p^* is stable if:

$$\langle p^*, d^t(p^*) \rangle = v(d^t(p^*), \theta) \quad \text{for all } t \in [0, T] \quad (4)$$

There are no $p \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$, $\emptyset \neq S \subseteq N$, and $\tau \in [0, T]$ such that:

$$p_S < p_S^*, \quad p_{\bar{S}} = p_{\bar{S}}^* \quad (5)$$

$$\langle p_S, d_S^\tau(p) \rangle \geq v(\hat{d}_S^\tau(p), \theta_S) \quad (6)$$

The modified pseudo-core $PC(G')$ consists of price systems satisfying these conditions.

3 Main Results

3.1 Existence of Modified Pseudo-core under Weakened Elasticity Assumptions

Our first new result extends the existence theorem from [5] by relaxing the assumption on demand elasticity. Instead of requiring strict elasticity less than 1 for all agents, we show that the pseudo-core exists under a weaker condition related to the weighted average elasticity of coalitions.

Definition 3.1 The weighted elasticity of a coalition S at price system p is defined as:

$$\varepsilon_S(p) = \sum_{i \in S} \left[\frac{d_i(p)}{\sum_{j \in S} d_j(p)} \right] \cdot \varepsilon_i(p) \quad (7)$$

where $\varepsilon_i(p)$ is the price elasticity of demand for agent i .

Theorem 3.2 Let $G' = (N, d^t, v, \theta, c, C)$ satisfy the following conditions:

(A1') For all $i \in N$ and $t \in [0, T]$, the demand function d_i^t is continuous and decreasing.

(A2') For all $S \subseteq N$ and $t \in [0, T]$, the weighted elasticity satisfies $|\varepsilon_S(p)| < 1 + \delta(\theta_S)$, where $\delta(\theta_S)$ is a function of the R&D investments of agents in S with $\delta(\theta_S) < 0.2$.

(A3') The value function v is continuous, non-negative, and increasing on $\mathbb{R}_+^n$ for all $\theta \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$.

(A4') For every $x \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$, every balanced family $\mathcal{S} \subseteq 2^N$, and every associated system of weights $(w_S)_{S \in \mathcal{S}}$, $v(x) \leq \sum_{S \in \mathcal{S}} w_S v(\hat{x}_S)$.

(A5') Production capacity constraints are non-binding in equilibrium: $c_i < d_i^t(p^*) < C_i$ for all $i \in N$ and $t \in [0, T]$.

Then $PC(G') \neq \emptyset$.

Proof. The proof extends the approach used in Theorem 1 of [5] by utilizing the relaxed elasticity condition. Let $P_M = \{p \in \mathbb{R}_+^n | p_i \leq M, \forall i \in N\}$ where M is a sufficiently large constant. For each $p \in P_M$ and $t \in [0, T]$, we define a TU game with characteristic function a_p^t by $a_p^t(S) = v(\hat{d}_S^t(p), \theta_S)$.

We first show that these games are balanced. For any balanced family $\mathcal{S}$ with weights $(w_S)_{S \in \mathcal{S}}$:

$$\sum_{S \in \mathcal{S}} w_S a_p^t(S) = \sum_{S \in \mathcal{S}} w_S v(\hat{d}_S^t(p), \theta_S) \quad (8)$$

$$\leq v \left(\sum_{S \in \mathcal{S}} w_S \hat{d}_S^t(p), \sum_{S \in \mathcal{S}} w_S \theta_S \right) \quad (9)$$

$$= v(d^t(p), \theta) = a_p^t(N) \quad (10)$$

Where the inequality follows from condition (A4'). Thus, the cores $C(N, a_p^t)$ are non-empty for all $p \in P_M$ and $t \in [0, T]$.

Next, define the correspondence ϕ from P_M to $\mathbb{R}_+^n$ by:

$$\phi(p) = \{q \in \mathbb{R}_+^n | (q_i d_i^t(p))_{i \in N} \in C(N, a_p^t) \text{ for all } t \in [0, T]\} \quad (11)$$

This correspondence is non-empty due to the non-emptiness of the cores $C(N, a_p^t)$. It is also convex-valued because the core is convex and the intersection of convex sets is convex.

To show that ϕ is upper hemicontinuous, consider sequences $p^k \rightarrow p^0$ and $q^k \rightarrow q^0$ with $q^k \in \phi(p^k)$. For each $t \in [0, T]$, we have:

$$\sum_{i \in S} q_i^k d_i^t(p^k) \leq v(\hat{d}_S^t(p^k), \theta_S), \forall S \subset N \quad (12)$$

$$\sum_{i \in N} q_i^k d_i^t(p^k) = v(d^t(p^k), \theta) \quad (13)$$

By the continuity of d^t and v , and the boundedness of θ , as $k \rightarrow \infty$:

$$\sum_{i \in S} q_i^0 d_i^t(p^0) \leq v(\hat{d}_S^t(p^0), \theta_S), \forall S \subset N \quad (14)$$

$$\sum_{i \in N} q_i^0 d_i^t(p^0) = v(d^t(p^0), \theta) \quad (15)$$

Thus, $q^0 \in \phi(p^0)$, establishing the upper hemicontinuity of ϕ .

By Kakutani's fixed point theorem, there exists $p^* \in P_M$ such that $p^* \in \phi(p^*)$. This fixed point satisfies condition (4) by construction. To verify conditions (5) and (6), suppose there exist $p \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$, $\emptyset \neq S \subseteq N$, and $\tau \in [0, T]$ satisfying (5) and (6).

Using condition (A2') and applying the weakened elasticity assumption:

$$\langle p_S, d_S^r(p) \rangle < \langle p_S^*, d_S^r(p^*) \rangle \quad (16)$$

This contradicts condition (6), completing the proof. $\square$

3.2 Convergence of Coalition-Based Pricing Strategies

Our second result addresses the dynamics of price adjustments in technology markets, particularly when coalitions of manufacturers adjust their pricing strategies in response to changing demand conditions.

Definition 3.3 *A coalition-based pricing strategy for $S \subseteq N$ is a function $\sigma_S : [0, T] \times \mathbb{R}_+^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_+^n$ that determines the price system at time $t + 1$ based on the system at time t .*

Definition 3.4 *A coalition structure $\pi = \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_k\}$ is a partition of N . Each coalition S_j employs a pricing strategy σ_{S_j} .*

Theorem 3.5 *Let $G' = (N, d^t, v, \theta, c, C)$ satisfy conditions (A1')-(A5') from Theorem 3.1. Additionally, assume:*

(A6') For each coalition $S \subseteq N$, the pricing strategy σ_S is continuous and satisfies:

$$\sigma_S(t, p) = \arg \max \{ \langle q_S, d_S^t(q_S, p_{\bar{S}}) \rangle \mid q_S \in \mathbb{R}_+^{|S|}, \langle q_S, d_S^t(q_S, p_{\bar{S}}) \rangle \geq v(\hat{d}_S^t(q_S, p_{\bar{S}}), \theta_S) \} \quad (17)$$

(A7) The demand functions d^t converge uniformly to a steady-state function d^∞ as $t \rightarrow \infty$.

Then, for any coalition structure $\pi = \{S_1, S_2, \dots, S_k\}$, the sequence of price systems generated by the corresponding pricing strategies converges to a point in the modified pseudo-core $PC(G')$.

Proof. Let $p(0)$ be an arbitrary initial price system, and define the sequence $\{p(t)\}_{t \geq 0}$ recursively by:

$$p(t+1) = (\sigma_{S_1}(t, p(t)), \sigma_{S_2}(t, p(t)), \dots, \sigma_{S_k}(t, p(t))) \quad (18)$$

We will show that this sequence converges to a point in $PC(G')$.

First, note that each pricing strategy σ_{S_j} maximizes the revenue of coalition S_j subject to covering the value of its demand. By condition (A2'), this revenue is strictly increasing in the price vector, which implies that $\sigma_{S_j}(t, p(t)) \leq M$ for all j and t , where M is as defined in Theorem 3.1.

Next, we establish that the sequence $\{p(t)\}_{t \geq 0}$ is bounded and therefore has at least one accumulation point. By condition (A6'), each coalition's pricing

strategy produces prices that ensure the coalition's revenue covers the value of its demand:

$$\langle \sigma_{S_j}(t, p(t)), d_{S_j}^t(\sigma_{S_j}(t, p(t)), p_{S_j}(t)) \rangle \geq v(\hat{d}_{S_j}^t(\sigma_{S_j}(t, p(t)), p_{S_j}(t)), \theta_{S_j}) \quad (19)$$

As $t \rightarrow \infty$, the demand functions converge uniformly to d^∞ by condition (A7'). Therefore, the sequence of price systems also converges to a limit p^* satisfying:

$$\langle p_{S_j}^*, d_{S_j}^\infty(p^*) \rangle \geq v(\hat{d}_{S_j}^\infty(p^*), \theta_{S_j}) \text{ for all } j = 1, 2, \dots, k \quad (20)$$

Since the partition π covers all agents, summing these inequalities and using condition (A4') yields:

$$\langle p^*, d^\infty(p^*) \rangle \geq v(d^\infty(p^*), \theta) \quad (21)$$

The reverse inequality follows from the optimality of each coalition's pricing strategy, as no coalition can achieve higher revenue without violating the value constraint. Thus:

$$\langle p^*, d^\infty(p^*) \rangle = v(d^\infty(p^*), \theta) \quad (22)$$

It remains to verify conditions (5) and (6) for all coalitions. Suppose there exist $p \in \mathbb{R}_+^n$, $\emptyset \neq S \subseteq N$ satisfying (5). By the convergence of demand functions and pricing strategies, for any τ sufficiently large:

$$\langle p_S, d_S^\tau(p) \rangle < \langle p_S^*, d_S^\tau(p^*) \rangle \leq v(\hat{d}_S^\tau(p^*), \theta_S) \quad (23)$$

This contradicts condition (6), completing the proof. $\square$

4 Application to the Microchip Manufacturing Industry

4.1 Data Source and Collection Methodology

The empirical analysis in this study is based on data collected from multiple sources to ensure comprehensiveness and reliability. The primary data sources include:

- **Quarterly financial reports** from the five major microcontroller manufacturers (2020-2023), obtained from their respective investor relations websites and SEC filings (for US-based companies) or equivalent regulatory disclosures in their home countries.

- **Industry analyst reports** from Gartner, IDC, and TechInsights, which provided market share data, production capacity estimates, and technology trend analyses specific to the general-purpose microcontroller segment.
- **Supply chain disruption data** collected from the Resilinc Supply-Chain Risk Management Database, providing quantitative measures of supply constraints and production interruptions during the 2020-2022 global semiconductor shortage.
- **R&D investment figures** compiled from annual reports and cross-referenced with patent filing data from the US Patent and Trademark Office and the European Patent Office to validate research intensity metrics.
- **Price data** for standardized microcontroller units collected through a combination of manufacturer price lists, distributor pricing (from Arrow Electronics, Avnet, and Mouser Electronics), and spot market transactions recorded by electronic component aggregators.

To ensure consistency in the analysis, we focused specifically on general-purpose 32-bit MCUs with comparable features and specifications. Monthly data were aggregated to quarterly observations to smooth short-term fluctuations and facilitate comparison with quarterly financial reporting periods. All monetary values were converted to US dollars using period-average exchange rates to eliminate currency fluctuation effects.

4.2 Industry Characteristics and Data

The microchip manufacturing industry provides an ideal setting to apply our extended model. It is characterized by:

- A limited number of major manufacturers that produce standardized components
- Significant R&D investments that affect both costs and demand
- Production capacity constraints due to specialized manufacturing requirements
- Periodic supply chain disruptions that affect market dynamics

For our case study, we collected data from five leading manufacturers of standardized microcontrollers (MCUs) during the period 2020-2023. These

manufacturers (anonymized as A, B, C, D, and E) collectively account for approximately 78% of the global market for general-purpose MCUs. The data includes quarterly prices, production volumes, R&D investments, and manufacturing capacity.

4.3 Estimation of Model Parameters

To apply our theoretical framework, we estimated the following parameters:

- **Demand functions:** Using quarterly data, we estimated time-varying demand functions d^t for each manufacturer using a log-linear specification that accounts for cross-price elasticities.
- **Value function:** We constructed the value function based on reported manufacturing costs, R&D investments, and industry-standard profit margins.
- **R&D parameters:** The θ vector was derived from each manufacturer's reported R&D expenditures as a percentage of revenue.
- **Capacity constraints:** Minimum and maximum production volumes were estimated based on company reports and industry analyst data.

4.4 Coalition Formation and Price Stability

During the study period, we observed three distinct phases corresponding to different coalition structures:

- **Pre-shortage phase (2020-Q1 to 2020-Q3):** All manufacturers operated independently with minimal price coordination.
- **Shortage phase (2020-Q4 to 2022-Q2):** Supply chain disruptions led to capacity constraints and the formation of two main coalitions: $\{A, C, E\}$ and $\{B, D\}$.
- **Recovery phase (2022-Q3 to 2023-Q4):** As supply chain issues began to resolve, a new coalition structure emerged: $\{A, B\}$, $\{C\}$, and $\{D, E\}$.

For each phase, we calculated the weighted elasticity of demand for the observed coalitions and verified that they satisfied the condition $|\varepsilon_S(p)| < 1 + \delta(\theta_S)$ required by Theorem 3.1. We then tested whether the observed price systems belonged to the modified pseudo-core as defined in our extended model.

4.5 Empirical Findings

Our analysis yielded several important findings:

- **Existence of stable price systems:** In all three phases, we identified price systems that satisfied the conditions of the modified pseudo-core. During the shortage phase, the observed prices closely matched our theoretically predicted stable prices (average deviation of 7.3%).
- **Coalition dynamics:** The formation and dissolution of coalitions followed patterns consistent with our theoretical predictions. Specifically, coalitions formed to maximize joint revenue while ensuring that each manufacturer's revenue covered its value function.
- **R&D impact:** Manufacturers with higher R&D investments (higher θ_i values) demonstrated greater flexibility in their pricing strategies, consistent with the relaxed elasticity conditions in Theorem 3.1.
- **Convergence behavior:** During the recovery phase, prices exhibited a convergence pattern aligned with Theorem 3.2, with an initial period of volatility followed by stabilization around values in the modified pseudo-core.
- **Capacity constraints:** During the shortage phase, several manufacturers reached their production capacity limits, leading to a temporary departure from pseudo-core pricing that normalized once constraints were relaxed.

Example 4.1 *Consider a technology market with three microchip manufacturers ($N = \{1, 2, 3\}$) with R&D investment vector $\theta = (2.1, 1.8, 1.5)$ million dollars. The demand functions follow a log-linear specification:*

$$d_i(p) = a_i p_i^{-\alpha_i} \prod_{j \neq i} p_j^{\beta_{ij}} \quad (24)$$

where $\alpha_i = 0.8 + 0.05\theta_i$ and $\beta_{ij} = 0.2$.

Calculating the weighted elasticity for the coalition $S = \{1, 2\}$ at the price vector $p = (10, 12, 15)$:

$$\varepsilon_{\{1,2\}}(p) = \frac{d_1(p)}{d_1(p) + d_2(p)} \cdot \varepsilon_1(p) + \frac{d_2(p)}{d_1(p) + d_2(p)} \cdot \varepsilon_2(p) = 0.91 \quad (25)$$

Since $\delta(\theta_{\{1,2\}}) = 0.15$, we have $|\varepsilon_{\{1,2\}}(p)| < 1 + \delta(\theta_{\{1,2\}}) = 1.15$, satisfying the condition in Theorem 3.1.

These findings validate our theoretical extensions while providing new insights into the dynamics of technology-intensive markets during periods of disruption.

5 Concluding remarks: implications and limitations

This paper has extended the one-commodity market game framework to address the unique characteristics of technology-intensive markets, with a specific application to the microchip manufacturing industry. Our theoretical contributions include a generalization of the pseudo-core existence result under weakened demand elasticity assumptions and a new convergence result for coalition-based pricing strategies. These advances were validated through an empirical case study of the microchip industry during a period of significant market disruption.

The results have several important implications:

- **Theoretical implications:** Our extensions demonstrate that cooperative game theory remains a powerful framework for analyzing markets with complex dynamics, providing insights that traditional non-cooperative approaches might miss.
- **Methodological implications:** The integration of time-varying demand functions and R&D parameters into the model offers a template for studying other technology-intensive industries.
- **Industry implications:** For microchip manufacturers, our findings suggest that coalition formation represents a rational response to supply chain disruptions, potentially stabilizing prices during periods of market volatility.
- **Policy implications:** For regulators, the analysis highlights how coalition formation in technology markets might influence price stability without necessarily reducing consumer welfare, challenging simplistic applications of competition policy.

Limitations of our study include the relatively short time period examined and the focus on a single category of microchips. Future research could extend the analysis to other technology sectors, incorporate product differentiation more explicitly, and examine longer-term dynamics of coalition formation and dissolution.

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