

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMPUTER APPLICATION AND MANAGEMENT

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AN OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT OF CONTEMPORARY OPTION PRICING MODELS

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ABSTRACT

There are several option pricing models available in the existing literature on financial derivatives. Most of them are numerically complex and difficult to comprehend. This paper is a literature review of the two most popular models, Binomial and Black-Scholes.

KEYWORDS

Option valuation models, Financial derivatives, Binomial, Black-Scholes.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

n the circuitous world of capital markets, options and measurements thereof are dependent on accurate mathematical estimates of fair price which are crucial for success. Many researchers prefer to use the traditional Black-Scholes model to price options. Most research projects deal with subjects that focus primarily on Black-Scholes, while occasionally discussing Cox-Ross-Rubinstein and other related models. Such models are based on informed assumptions. A common feature of these models is the assumption that, on a logarithmic scale, the distribution of returns (profits or losses) in the market is normal (Black-Scholes), something close to normal, or something that approaches normal in the limit (Cox-Ross-Rubinstein). Believers of "random walk"-proponents of the Efficient Market Hypothesis (EMH)—would argue that the assumption of normally distributed returns is justified by the Central Limit Theorem. Additionally, stock returns reflect the accumulation of large numbers of equally small, random movements. However, the fundamental question is "Do stock returns really follow the familiar bell-shaped curve of the normal distribution?"

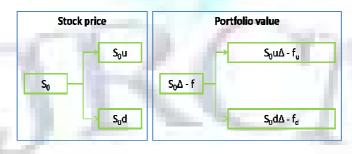
The study of option valuation models is an important consideration. Therefore, in this paper the objective is to undertake a study of the contemporary option valuation models.

In this paper, an overview of the two models which formed the groundwork for option valuation, i.e. the Binary option pricing model and the Black-Scholes model has been presented. This is then followed by an analysis which links the two models empirically using hypothetical data.

BINOMIAL OPTION PRICING MODEL

Cox, Ross and Rubinstein proposed a variant of this model in 1979. The model is based on certain assumptions, which are essentially straight forward and simple to understand. The first assumption is that the stock price (underlying) follows a random walk. A subsequent assumption which is a standard in a host of other valuations is that arbitrage opportunities do not exist. Further as the name suggests, there are only two possible outcomes for the stock price movement, up by a certain percentage or down by a certain percentage. A précis of the methodology is that it is possible to set up a portfolio consisting of some number of a particular stock and an option so that the value of the portfolio at the end of the time period is fixed, i.e. there is no uncertainty. Since, the portfolio carries no uncertainty, i.e. no risk about its value at the end of the period; it should earn only the risk free rate. Hence, we can calculate backwards to arrive at the option's price.

In the single period model, we consider a portfolio with long position in Δ shares. The portfolio also has a short position (sold) one unit of an option in the same stock. S_0 is the current stock price, S_{0u} is the stock price on the uptick and S_{0d} is the stock price on the downtick. Also, 'f' is the current value of the option. Equating the value at the end of the period for both uptick and downtick and simplifying, we get;



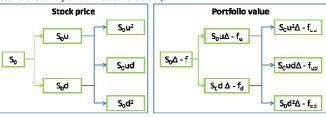
 $f = e^{-rT}[pf_u + (1-p)f_d)$

where, the symbols have their usual meanings and

 $p = (e^{-rT} - d) / (u-d)$

Where p is the portfolio value.

Similar to the single period model, we represent the two period model as below;



In this case, there is the second period which leads to 3 possibilities in the movement of the stock price as shown in the diagram. Extending similar logic as single period model, we simplify f as;

 $f = e^{-2r\Delta t} [p^2 f_{uu} + 2p(1-p) f_{ud} + (1-p)^2 f_{dd}]$

Now that we have introduced the single period and two period binomial models, we can extend the number of steps to make the valuation more realistic. However, the essence of the argument remains the same.

BLACK-SCHOLES OPTION PRICING MODEL

The Black-Scholes model is arguably the most popular option pricing model. It was first published in "The pricing of corporate liabilities" by F. Black and M. Scholes in the Journal of Political Economy, 1973.

The model makes several key assumptions like being able to borrow and lend at constant risk free rate and absence of transaction costs and taxes. Further, it assumes that the underlying asset follows a geometric Brownian motion and hence the changes in the stock price in a short period are normally distributed. In addition to these, the absence of dividends and the 'no arbitrage opportunity' sum up most of the crucial assumptions of the Black-Scholes model. As per the model, the value of the call option on a non-dividend paying stock is;

 $c = S_0 N(d_1) - Ke^{-rT}N(d_2)$

and the value of a put call option on a non-dividend paying stock is;

 $P = Ke^{-rT}N(-d_2) - S_0N(-d_1)$

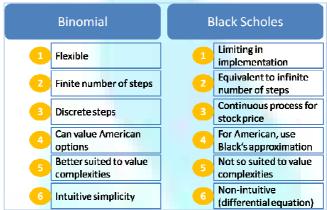
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 $d_1 = [\ln(S_0/K) + (r + \sigma^2/2)T]/\sigma VT$

 $d_2 = [ln(S_0/K) + (r-\sigma^2/2)T]/\sigma VT$

The symbols used in the equation above have their usual meanings. It is important here to note that $N(d_1)$ and $N(d_2)$ and cumulative probability distributions. Also, the distribution $N(d_2)$ refers to the probability that in a risk free world, the option will be exercised.

THE TWO MODELS SIDE BY SIDE



One of the primary reasons the Black Scholes model continues to be the preferred model is speed. It supports calculating a large number of option prices in a very short time.

The assumptions of the Binomial Option Pricing model help simplify the algorithm/ mathematics significantly. However, as always, this simplification comes at the cost of sacrificing some real world scenarios. But that does not make the binomial option pricing model any less realistic. The output of the BOP model converges to that of the Black Scholes model as the number of periods in the model increases to infinity. This implies that the discrete-time Binomial Option Pricing model ultimately becomes identical to the continuous time Black-Scholes model. The BOP model, being the simpler one to comprehend and implement with its less binding assumptions, serves as an approximation to the Black-Scholes model.

Further, in contrast to the Black Scholes model, the BOP model can be used to price a wider range of options, e.g, pricing an American option whose underlying is a stock with irregular dividends payout. Unlike Black Scholes, Binomial Option Pricing models can value American Options because it is possible to check at every node the possibility of early exercise.

Again, in contrast to the Black Scholes model, Binomial Option Pricing model is relevant to value options whose underlying assets' prices follow distribution of returns other than lognormal. This can be achieved by suitably tweaking the values for 'u' &'d' in the equations.

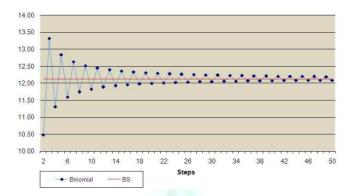
In order to improve the efficacy of the Binomial Option Pricing model, a trinomial method has been proposed. It is similar to the Binomial Option Pricing model with the addition of one more possible path. So, in the trinomial model there are 3 possible paths (Up, Down and Stable) at each node instead of two for binomial. As is intuitive, the trinomial model converges faster to the Black Scholes output than the binomial model.

CONVERGENCE OF BINOMIAL AND TRINOMIAL OUTPUT TO BLACK SCHOLES

In order to show the convergence of the binomial model output to Black Scholes output let us take some hypothetical data. Let us consider;

- Option type = European Put
- Current stock price (Underlying) = \$100
- Strike price = \$101
- Risk free interest rate = 5%
- No dividends
- Volatility = 30%
- Time to maturity = 2 years

Using this hypothetical data, let us see the behavior of the Binomial model vis-à-vis the Black Scholes. The option price suggested by the Black-Scholes for this data is a single value of \$12.1256. However, as per the definition of Binomial the value changes as per the number of steps that we chose for the iteration. The below chart plots the changing Binomial output for the above data with increasing number of steps. This output is the blue line in the chart. The constant Black-Scholes output (\$12.1256) is also given for reference by the red line.



As can be seen in the chart, the binomial output converges to the Black-Scholes output when the number of steps increases.

Number of	Black Scholes	Binomial	Absolute			
steps	output	output	Difference			
10	12.1256	11.8286	2.45%			
15	12.1256	12.3597	1.93%			
20	12.1256	11.9975	1.06%			
25	12.1256	12.2640	1.14%			
30	12.1256	12.0507	0.62%			
35	12.1256	12.2232	0.80%			
40	12.1256	12.0760	0.41%			
45	12.1256	12.2005	0.62%			
50	12.1256	12.0904	0.29%			
100	12.1256	12.1165	0.08%			
125	12.1256	12.1498	0.20%			
150	12.1256	12.1235	0.02%			
175	12.1256	12.1417	0.13%			
200	12.1256	12.1264	0.01%			

Also given above is the tabular representation of the output. It shows that when the number of steps is high (Say 200), the difference is only marginal (Around 0.01% in this case).

Number of	Black Scholes	Trinomial	Absolute
steps	output	output	Difference
10	12.1256	11.9975	1.06%
15	12.1256	12.0507	0.62%
20	12.1256	12.0760	0.41%
25	12.1256	12.0904	0.29%
30	12.1256	12.0996	0.21%
35	12.1256	12.2231	0.80%
40	12.1256	12.0759	0.41%
45	12.1256	12.2005	0.62%
50	12.1256	12.1165	0.08%

We also present similar values for the trinomial model for exactly the same set of data that we considered for binomial model. By definition, trinomial model is expected to converge to Black-Scholes faster than the binomial model. The table above presents exactly the same inference. Here at 50 steps the trinomial value is only 0.08% away from the Black Scholes value. As was seen earlier, at the same 50 steps, the binomial output was 0.29% away from the Black Scholes value. As is obvious and has been pointed numerous times, it would be gross oversimplification to prefer one model as superior to the others. As a quick summary, the Black Scholes model has inherent advantages like it being the more recognized model and being faster to calculate. On the other hand, the binomial (and by extension the trinomial) model is intuitive and easier to understand. The best part of all the chaos here is that on the average these models produce similar results. In addition there are at times scenarios which dictate a clear preference for a mode (For e.g. binomial to value American options).

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