

Price momentum: orthogonalisation vs volatility targeting

Claire Jones, CFA

Analyst

Tel: +44 20 7568 1873 claire-c.jones@ubs.com

Desi Ivanova

Analyst

Tel: +44 20 7568 1754 desi-r.ivanova@ubs.com

David Jessop

Analyst

Tel: +44 20 7567 9882 david.jessop@ubs.com

Josie Gerken, PhD

Analyst

Tel: +44 20 7568 3560 josephine.gerken@ubs.com



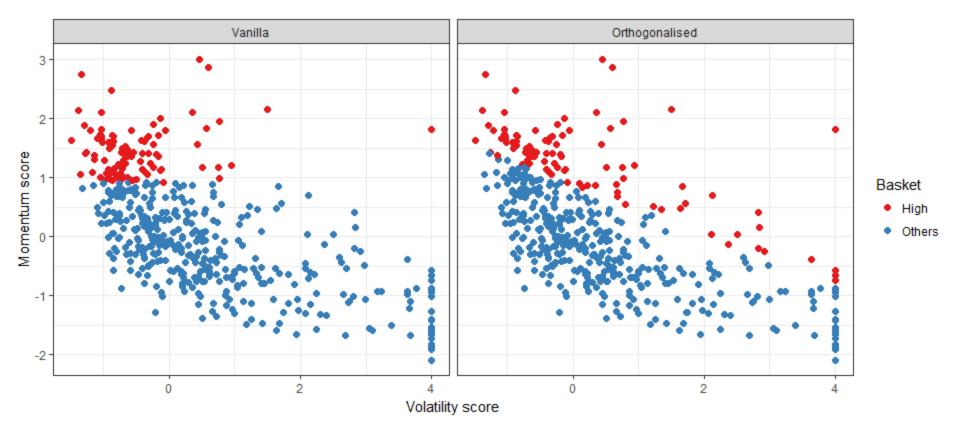
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What do we mean by orthogonalisation? (1)

- First, we normalise the stocks' factor values by subtracting the median value, dividing by the median absolute deviation (MAD) and winsorising at +/- 4.
- Then we regress the stocks' momentum score onto the other factor and take the residuals. This is the orthogonalised momentum score.



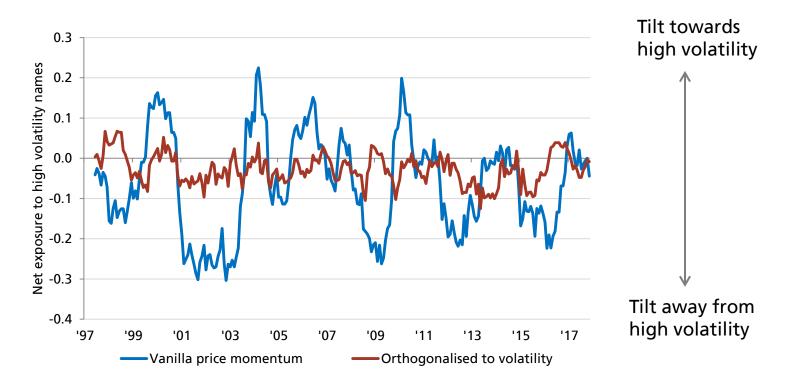
Source: UBS Quants, Europe, data as of March 2009, top quintile stocks highlighted in red



1

What do we mean by orthogonalisation? (2)

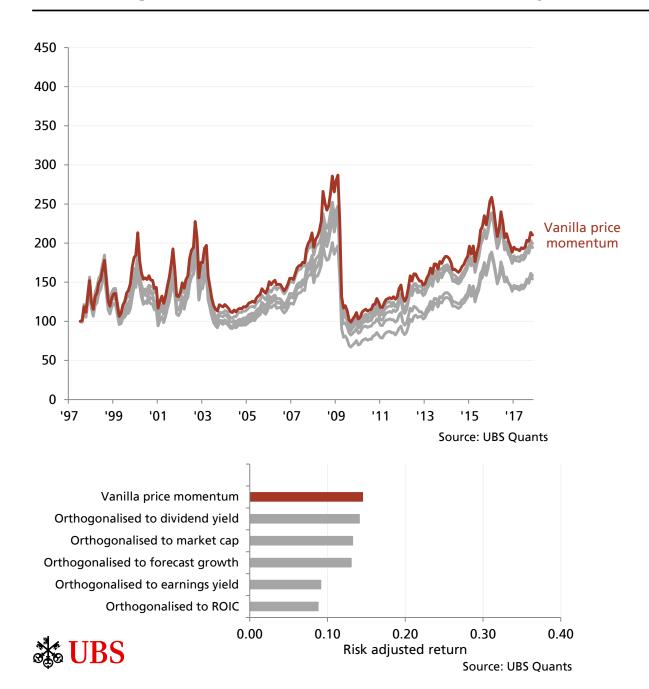
The orthogonalisation does successfully reduce the exposure to the other factor.



Source: UBS Quants, Developed world, proportion of names in high momentum basket also in high volatility basket minus the proportion of names in low momentum basket also in high volatility basket (where high volatility means the top 10%)

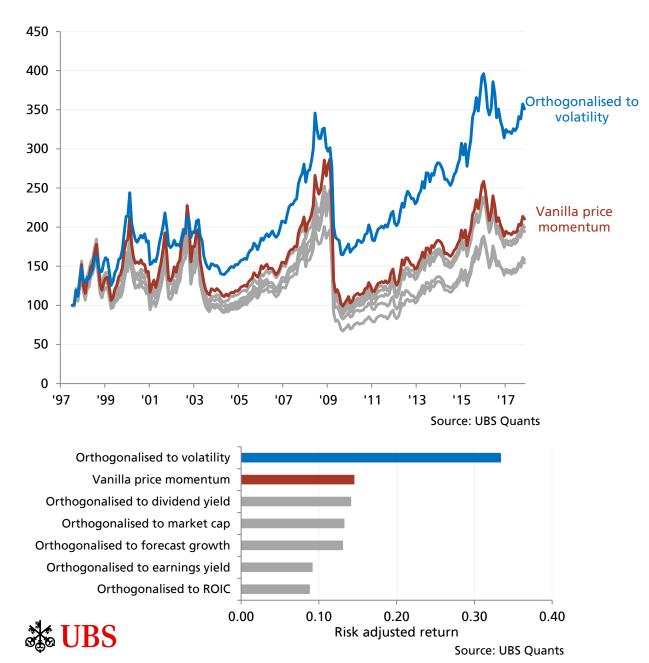


Orthogonalisation is "normally" bad for momentum ...



- Momentum usually does better if you "let it run". For example, sector neutrality or country neutrality typically reduce its performance.
- Orthogonalising to another factor can be described as factor neutrality.
- Orthogonalising against a single factor typically slightly reduces performance.
- If you orthogonalise against multiple factors, you reduce the performance further and further.

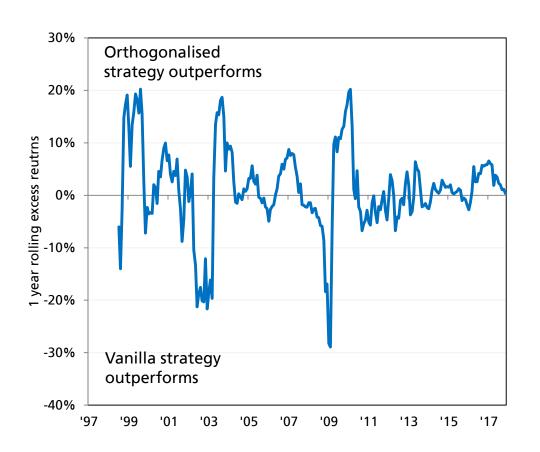
... but orthogonalising against volatility works

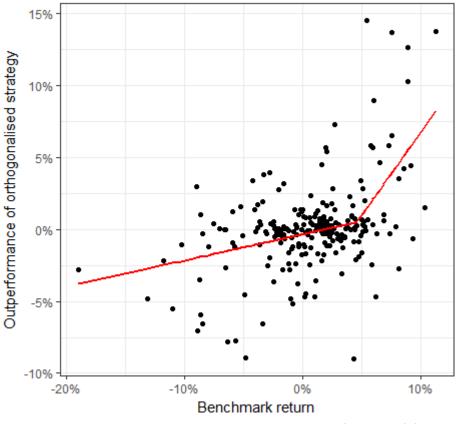


- The notable exception is volatility.
- Orthogonalising against volatility seems to improve the performance significantly.

What's going on?

- Many of momentum's drawdowns have been because the strategy has a net negative beta during market drawdowns and as a result suffers if / when the market rallies sharply e.g.
 March '09 collapse.
- Orthogonalisation reduces the beta exposure and helps to avoids this.







Source: UBS Quants

Summary of volatility targeting

$$Weight\ in\ strategy = \frac{target\ risk}{Estimate\ of\ current\ risk}$$

- Volatility targeting a price momentum strategy improves the Sharpe ratio. It affects both the return and the risk.
- It improves returns:
 - As a trend following strategy, price momentum tends to underperform at times when the trend changes. Changes in the market trend are typically accompanied by rising volatility.
 - As a result, volatility targeting causes you to reduce your exposure at times when underperformance is expected.
- It reduces risk:
 - The volatility of price momentum is unusually persistent, so if you see high volatility now, it is likely to continue.
 - Hence volatility targeting causes you to reduce your exposure at times when higher volatility is expected.

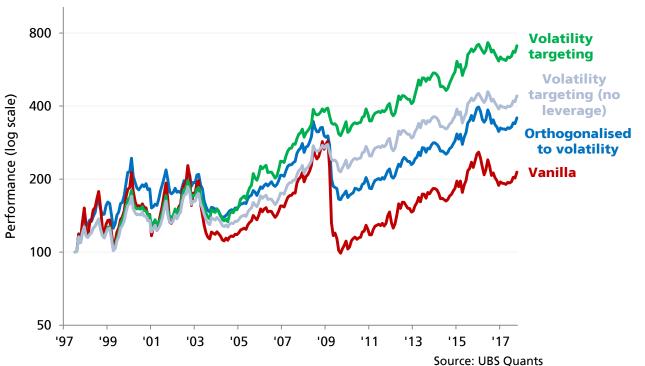


Orthogonalisation vs. volatility targeting

 Volatility targeted price momentum has consistently outperformed the vanilla price momentum strategy.

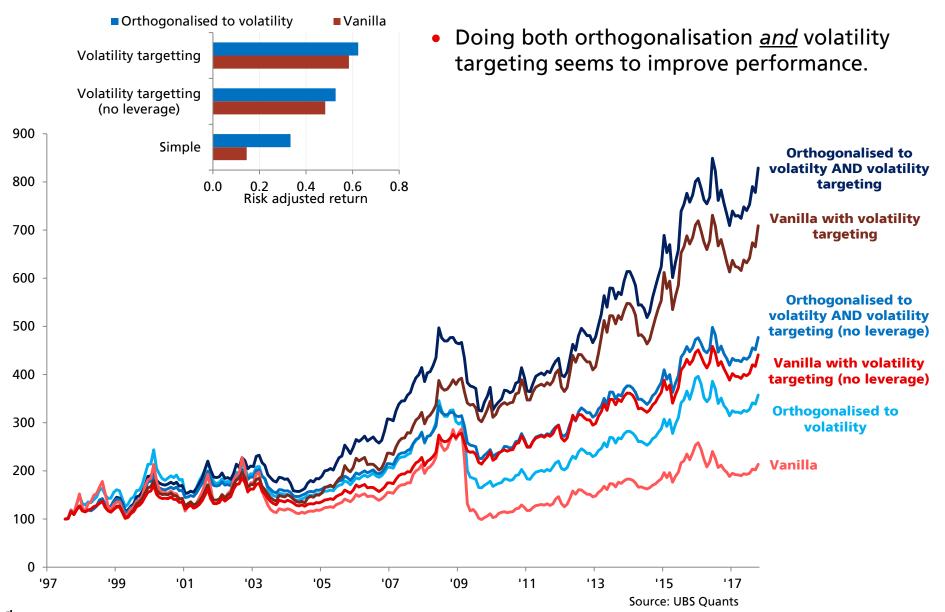
50% 40% Orthogonalised year rolling excess returns to volatility 30% 20% Volatility 10% targeting 0% Volatility -10% targeting (no leverage) -20% -30% -40% '97 '01 '03 '05 '07 '09 '15 '17 '99 '11 '13

 Volatility targeting would also have performed better than orthogonalisation, even if we do not allow leverage.



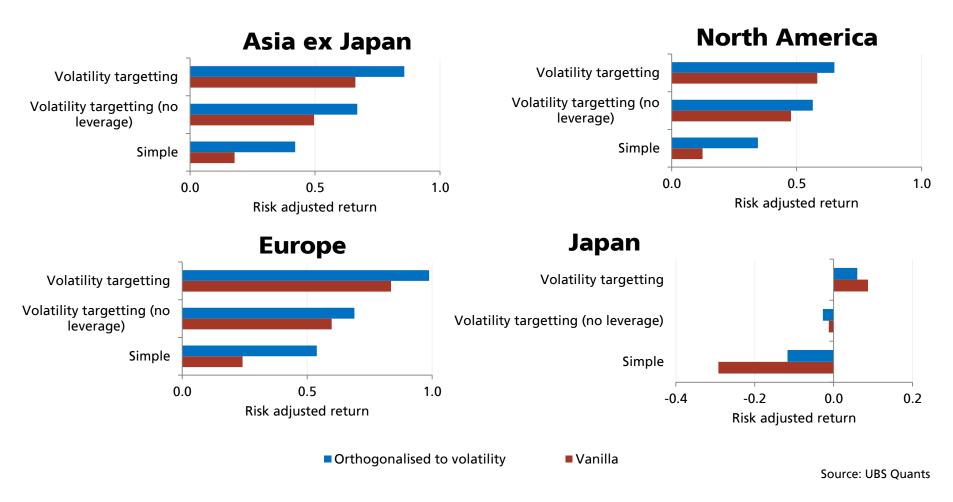


Orthogonalisation plus volatility targeting





Regional results



 The results are consistent across three of the four different regions – volatility targeting is more effective than orthogonalisation, but using both leads to higher risk adjusted returns.



Conclusions

- Orthogonalisation is typically bad for price momentum, but orthogonalising to volatility appears to improve performance.
- Orthogonalising to volatility improves performance by reducing the negative tilts to beta momentum has during market drawdowns and so avoiding the strong drawdowns momentum experiences when the market rallies.
- Volatility targeting also improves price momentum, via a similar mechanism, but appears to be more effective than orthogonalisation.
- Combining both volatility targeting and orthogonalisation appears to improve the performance of price momentum more than either approach taken individually.



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Our quantitative models rely on reported financial statement information, consensus earnings forecasts and stock prices. Errors in these numbers are sometimes impossible to prevent (as when an item is misstated by a company). Also, the models employ historical data to estimate the efficacy of stock selection strategies and the relationships among strategies, which may change in the future. Additionally, unusual company-specific events could overwhelm the systematic influence of the strategies used to rank and score stocks.

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Contact information

UBS Limited

5 Broadgate London EC2M 2QS

Tel: +44-207-567 8000

www.ubs.com

