Modelling the Effect of Performance Management Systems on Cognitive Engagement of Personnel in Nigeria Immigration Service

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Abstract

Effective Performance Management Systems (PMS) have become important for enhancing employee engagement and organisational performance. Despite increasing investment in performance management within Nigeria's public sector, security agencies continue to experience challenges associated with employee engagement and performance outcomes. This study examined the influence of Performance Management Systems on cognitive engagement among personnel of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Lagos State Command, addressing the limited empirical evidence on this relationship. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining a descriptive survey with qualitative interviews. Data were obtained from 360 personnel through hardcopy and online questionnaires, with 331 valid responses retrieved, while nine key informants were purposively interviewed. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Findings revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between PMS and cognitive engagement ($\beta = 0.928$, $T = 66.759$, $p < 0.001$). The R^2 value of 0.859 indicated that PMS explained 85.9% of the variance in cognitive engagement. Qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results, showing that clear performance targets, regular feedback, and recognition enhanced personnel's mental focus and involvement in their duties. However, delayed appraisals, limited continuous feedback, and bureaucratic processes constrained engagement. The study concluded that effective PMS implementation is critical for strengthening cognitive engagement in paramilitary organisations. It recommended timely appraisal, continuous feedback mechanisms, and personalised development plans to enhance employee engagement and operational effectiveness within the NIS.

Keywords: Cognitive Engagement; Internal Security; Nigeria Immigration Service; Performance Management System; Staff Engagement.

Introduction

Performance Management System (PMS) has become an important organisational mechanism for aligning employee behaviour with organisational objectives and improving productivity. An effective PMS provides clear performance expectations, continuous feedback, fair appraisal and opportunities for learning and development (Aguinis, 2019; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). These practices can strengthen motivation, role clarity and employees' willingness to invest attention in their work. Employee engagement, in turn, reflects the psychological, emotional and behavioural connection employees develop with their work and organisation (Rich et al., 2010; Bakker, 2022).

Recent studies suggest that organisations combining PMS with engagement-oriented practices can improve productivity, reduce absenteeism and strengthen employee loyalty (Neuber et al., 2022; Mustaqim et al., 2024). Engagement is multidimensional, with cognitive, emotional and physical dimensions increasingly recognised in the literature (Huang et al., 2022; Ashfaq et al., 2022). Cognitive engagement is particularly important in security work because it involves mental focus, concentration, absorption and the willingness to apply knowledge to work problems.

Across many developed and emerging countries, performance management has moved beyond conventional annual appraisal towards continuous feedback, digital monitoring, competency assessment and development-oriented practices. Public organisations in countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Singapore, Australia, South Africa, Malaysia, India and Germany have adopted different forms of continuous and technology-supported performance management (Chumney et al., 2019; Burnett & Lisk, 2021). These developments demonstrate the growing emphasis on linking accountability with employee development and engagement.

In Nigeria, however, performance management in many public institutions remains affected by inconsistent appraisal, weak performance measurement and limited feedback. Such weaknesses may reduce motivation and cognitive involvement (Eneanya, 2018; Ugoani, 2022). Fairness is also important because employees assess whether performance expectations, evaluations and rewards are equitable in comparison with others (Adams, 1965; Okafor & Amalu, 2021). When evaluation processes are perceived as inconsistent or unfair, employee commitment and productivity may suffer.

The Nigeria Immigration Service occupies an important position within Nigeria's internal security system. Established in 1963 and strengthened by the Nigeria Immigration Service Act of 2015, the Service is responsible for immigration control, passport administration, border management and migration-related functions. Its personnel operate in an environment requiring alertness, sound judgement and timely decision-making. Evidence from Nigerian security organisations indicates that job stress, weak HR practices, limited support and inadequate development opportunities can undermine engagement (Bisji et al., 2021; Dunmade et al., 2019).

Despite evidence that performance management practices can improve employee engagement and performance (Awan et al., 2020; Govender & Bussin, 2020; Alsuwaidi et al., 2021; Audu & Ochonogor, 2025), the existing evidence is largely concerned with general employee engagement, employee performance or non-paramilitary settings. Limited empirical evidence explains how performance management systems affect the cognitive dimension of engagement among personnel of the Nigeria Immigration Service. This gap is important because NIS personnel work in an environment that requires sustained attention, sound judgement and timely decision-making. The present study therefore models the effect of PMS on cognitive engagement of personnel in the Lagos State Command, focusing on performance planning, performance monitoring and performance feedback, and provides empirical evidence from both questionnaire and interview data to support performance management practice in a paramilitary setting.

Literature Review

Performance Management Systems

Performance Management System is a strategic human resource management practice through which organisations plan, monitor, assess and improve employee performance in relation to organisational objectives. It is broader than an annual appraisal because it involves an ongoing process of goal alignment, monitoring, feedback and employee development (Lebas, 1995; Cleveland et al., 1989; Madison, 2016). When implemented consistently, PMS can create clearer expectations, stronger accountability and opportunities for performance improvement.

Performance planning

Performance planning involves translating organisational objectives into individual responsibilities and measurable expectations. Clear planning helps employees understand what they are expected to accomplish and provides a basis for later assessment. Odhiambo (2015) and Awan et al. (2020) suggest that clear objectives can improve accountability and performance because employees have a better understanding of the connection between their duties and organisational goals. In contrast, unclear expectations can create role ambiguity and weaken engagement.

Performance monitoring

Performance monitoring is the continuing observation and assessment of employee performance against agreed expectations. It allows supervisors to identify gaps, provide support and take corrective action. Effective monitoring can build confidence and encourage continuous learning through coaching and timely intervention (Madison, 2016; Govender & Bussin, 2020). Weak monitoring, on the other hand, may allow performance problems to persist and can reduce motivation.

Performance feedback

Performance feedback provides employees with information about the quality and outcome of their work. Constructive feedback helps employees recognise strengths, correct weaknesses and understand how their performance relates to organisational expectations. Awan et al. (2020) and Alsuwaidi et al. (2021) emphasise that feedback is most useful when it is clear, fair and developmental. When feedback is delayed or limited to formal appraisal periods, opportunities for learning and improvement may be lost.

Cognitive Engagement of Personnel

Employee engagement refers to the investment of personal resources in work. Rich et al. (2010) describe job engagement in terms of cognitive, emotional and physical investment, while Bakker (2022) highlights the importance of employees' psychological connection to their work. Cognitive engagement concerns the mental effort employees devote to their tasks. It includes concentration, sustained attention, mental absorption, problem solving and the application of knowledge to work activities (Huang et al., 2022).

Cognitive engagement is especially relevant to immigration and other security duties, where personnel may need to interpret instructions, assess documents, make decisions and respond quickly to operational situations. A worker may be physically present but mentally disengaged; therefore, measuring cognitive engagement provides a more focused understanding of how employees invest attention and mental effort in their duties.

Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualises PMS as the independent variable, measured through performance planning, performance monitoring and performance feedback, while cognitive engagement of personnel is the

dependent variable. The framework specifies a positive effect from PMS to cognitive engagement of personnel. The theoretical mechanism is that clear performance planning provides direction, performance monitoring provides information about progress and areas requiring correction, and performance feedback provides guidance and support for improvement. These PMS resources can reduce uncertainty and help personnel sustain concentration, mental focus and intellectual involvement in their duties. Conversely, delayed, inconsistent or overly bureaucratic PMS practices may weaken the resource value of the system and reduce cognitive involvement.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Synthesis

This study is anchored on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory. Bakker and Demerouti's model explains engagement in terms of the interaction between job demands and job resources. Job demands such as workload, stress and risk can consume employees' energy, whereas resources such as support, feedback, training and development can help employees cope with demands and sustain engagement. In this perspective, resources do not merely reduce strain; they can also stimulate motivation and involvement.

The JD-R perspective is relevant to the NIS because personnel operate in an environment where operational demands may be substantial. Border control, migration management, documentation and security responsibilities require sustained attention and sound judgement. Where employees receive adequate guidance, feedback, support and development opportunities, these resources may strengthen their ability to remain mentally involved in their duties.

PMS can therefore be viewed as an organisational resource. Performance planning provides direction and clarifies expectations; monitoring provides information about progress and areas requiring correction; and feedback provides guidance for improvement. When these practices are fair, timely and developmental, they may strengthen cognitive engagement. When they are delayed, inconsistent or overly bureaucratic, their value as resources is reduced.

Empirical Review

Awan et al. (2020) examined performance management systems in private commercial banks in Pakistan using data from 285 employees and Structural Equation Modelling. They found that perceptions of effective PMS positively influenced work engagement and employee performance, with engagement playing a mediating role. The study supports the present argument that performance management can influence employee attitudes and outcomes, but its private-sector context and use of general work engagement leave a contextual and dimensional gap.

Govender and Bussin (2020), using qualitative interviews in a South African fast-moving consumer goods organisation, reported concerns about communication, feedback, employee empowerment and alignment between performance measures and job duties. Participants favoured continuous discussions and meaningful feedback rather than performance management as a periodic administrative exercise. Their findings support the importance of ongoing PMS but did not statistically model cognitive engagement in a Nigerian security organisation.

Alsuwaidi et al. (2021) found that fair, transparent and development-oriented appraisal practices were associated with stronger motivation and commitment, while perceived bias and inadequate feedback weakened willingness to contribute. Saratun (2016) similarly linked clear expectations, ongoing dialogue and positive feedback with engagement. Odhiambo (2015) reported positive relationships between goal setting,

appraisal, training, feedback and employee productivity.

More recent Nigerian evidence also points to the importance of PMS. Audu and Ochonogor (2025) found positive effects of performance planning, appraisal, development and feedback on employee performance in the hotel industry. Neuber et al. (2022), through a meta-analysis, reported that work engagement is positively associated with performance and negatively associated with absenteeism. However, these studies did not directly examine cognitive engagement within a paramilitary organisation.

The gap addressed by this study is therefore both contextual and conceptual: existing research provides evidence that PMS matters for engagement and performance, but limited evidence explains the direct relationship between PMS and the cognitive dimension of engagement among NIS personnel. The present study responds to this gap through quantitative modelling supported by qualitative evidence.

Methodology

The study was conducted at the Nigeria Immigration Service, Lagos State Command. Lagos State was purposively selected because of its strategic operational importance and the range of migration, documentation, border-management and security responsibilities undertaken within the Command. A descriptive survey design was adopted, supported by qualitative interviews. The mixed-method approach enabled the study to obtain measurable evidence of the relationship between PMS and cognitive engagement while also capturing participants' explanations of how performance management operates in practice.

The study population comprised 2,400 personnel of the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Lagos State Command, consisting of 1,950 operational officers and 450 administrative officers. The population figures were obtained from the personnel records of the NIS Lagos State Command and covered officers assigned to operational and administrative functions within the Command. Using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, $n = N/[1 + N(e^2)]$, with $N = 2,400$ and $e = 0.05$, the minimum sample size was 342.86, rounded to 343 respondents. A total of 360 questionnaires were distributed to provide an allowance for non-response. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used. Personnel were grouped into operational and administrative categories, after which respondents were selected using simple random sampling to provide representation across staff categories. The survey therefore provided the empirical basis for assessing the effect of PMS on cognitive engagement among the personnel studied.

For the qualitative component, 10 key informants were initially identified and selected on the basis of their experience within the Command, rank or position that provided relevant operational or supervisory exposure, and direct knowledge of performance management practices. Nine were successfully interviewed. The interviews were intended to provide deeper explanations of the factors that support or constrain cognitive engagement under the PMS.

Instrument and Measurement

The questionnaire was adapted from established measures reported in the study's source literature. PMS items drew on work including Audu and Ochonogor (2025), Odhiambo (2015), Eneanya (2018), Cleveland and Williams (1989) and Awan et al. (2020). Engagement-related items were informed by Abdullahi et al. (2022), Abugu and Othman (2025), Burnett and Lisk (2021), Gede and Huluka (2024), Govender and Bussin (2020) and Mustaqim et al. (2024). The final instrument used items covering performance management and engagement constructs.

Table 1: Source of Items in the Questionnaire

Variable

No. of items

Selected sources

Performance Management System

20

Audu & Ochonogor (2025); Odhiambo (2015); Eneanya (2018); Cleveland & Williams (1989); Awan et al. (2020)

Employee Engagement

20

Abdullahi et al. (2022); Abugu & Othman (2025); Burnett & Lisk (2021); Gede & Huluka (2024); Govender & Bussin (2020)

Source: Adapted Questionnaire

Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were administered in hardcopy and online formats. Of the 360 questionnaires distributed, 331 were correctly completed and returned, representing 92.2%. The 360 distributed questionnaires included the minimum Yamane sample requirement of 343 and provided an allowance for non-response. A pilot test was conducted to assess clarity and reliability. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS and PLS-SEM. The measurement model was assessed through factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was used to test the structural effect. Qualitative interview responses were analysed thematically. Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, confidentiality and approval from the relevant ethics committee.

Data Analysis and Results

This section presents the analysis of data collected through questionnaire and interview. The unit of analysis for this study comprised all 1,850 personnel of the NIS Lagos State Command, including 1,500 field officers and 350 administrative and managerial staff.

Table 2: Response rate and respondent profile

Response category

Number

Percentage

Correctly filled and returned

331

92.2%

Not returned/not completely filled

29

7.8%

Total

360

100%

Source: Field Survey Data.

The study obtained 331 usable questionnaire responses from the 360 questionnaires administered. This represents a 92.2% retrieval rate and provides the basis for the quantitative analysis.

Table 3: Demographics of NIS Personnel

Characteristic

Category

N

Gender

Male

198

Female

133

Age

18–20

20

21–30

78

31–40

96

41–50

92

51–60

35

61 and above

10

Education

Primary

7

SSCE/NECO

19

Trade Test

21

OND

41

HND/B.Sc

148

M.Sc/MBA

67

Ph.D.

28

Service

1–5 years

62

6–10 years

129

11–15 years

88

16 years and above

52

Source: Field Survey Data.

Comprised 198 males and 133 females. The age distribution included early-career, mid-career and more experienced personnel, with a substantial concentration between 31 and 50 years. Educational qualifications ranged from primary school certificate to Ph.D., with HND/B.Sc. and postgraduate qualifications forming the largest groups. In terms of service experience, the largest group had served between six and ten years. The profile therefore reflects variation in gender, age, educational background and organisational experience.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics

Measure

Mean

SD

Clear performance objectives

4.105

0.742

Supervisory feedback

3.980

0.801

Performance evaluation fairness

3.721

0.884

Reward system linkage

3.612

0.903

Operational monitoring

3.951

0.776

Duty post inspection

4.012

0.759

Task focus

4.325

0.612

Performance improvement thinking

4.287

0.645

Attention to instructions

4.301

0.631

Mental stimulation

3.964

0.718

Source: Field survey data.

The descriptive results indicate generally positive perceptions of PMS. Clear performance objectives recorded the highest PMS mean (4.105), followed by duty post inspection (4.012) and supervisory feedback (3.980). Reward system linkage had the lowest PMS mean (3.612), suggesting comparatively weaker perceptions of how rewards are connected to performance. Cognitive engagement scores were also high, ranging from 3.964 for mental stimulation to 4.325 for task focus. Overall, the results suggest that personnel reported strong task attention and mental involvement, although some aspects of performance management remain less satisfactory.

Table 5: Measurement model (Reliability and Validity)

Construct

Items

Loading range

Cronbach α

CR

AVE

Performance Management System

6

0.721–0.842

0.891

0.904

0.612

Cognitive Engagement

4

0.758–0.886

0.873

0.901

0.655

Source: Field Survey Data.

The measurement model was assessed to establish the reliability and convergent validity of the constructs before testing the structural relationship. The study also examined common method bias and model fit.

All factor loadings exceeded 0.70, indicating that the retained indicators represented their respective constructs adequately. Cronbach's alpha values of 0.891 for PMS and 0.873 for cognitive engagement demonstrate strong internal consistency. Composite reliability values were also above the 0.70 benchmark, while AVE values exceeded 0.50, supporting convergent validity.

Table 6: Model Assessment, Common Method Bias, and Model Fit Indices

Assessment

Result

Interpretation

Harman single-factor test

38.420%

Below 50%; no serious CMB indicated

Chi-square/df

2.41

Good fit

CFI

0.951

Excellent fit

TLI

0.942

Good fit

RMSEA

0.061

Acceptable fit

SRMR

0.047

Good fit

Source: Field survey data.

The Harman single-factor test produced 38.420% variance explained by the single factor, below the stated 50% threshold. The reported fit statistics were also within the study's recommended ranges. Together, these results support the adequacy of the measurement model for subsequent structural analysis.

Test of hypothesis

H01: Performance management system has no significant effect with cognitive engagement of personnel of the Nigeria Immigration Service.

Table 7: Path Coefficients for PMS and Cognitive Engagement of Security Personnel

Relationship

B

STDEV

T-statistic

p-value

R^2

PMS → Cognitive Engagement

0.928

0.059

66.759

<0.001

0.859

Source: Field Survey Data.

The structural model produced a path coefficient of 0.928, indicating a very strong positive relationship between PMS and cognitive engagement. The T-statistic of 66.759 and $p < 0.001$ indicate that the relationship is statistically significant. The R^2 of 0.859 means that PMS explains 85.9% of the observed variance in cognitive engagement in the study model, while the adjusted R^2 was 0.847. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

The result suggests that changes in the effectiveness of PMS are strongly associated with changes in

personnel's mental focus, attention and involvement in their work. In practical terms, clear expectations, monitoring and feedback appear to matter beyond the administrative function of appraisal; they may shape how personnel approach and concentrate on their duties.

Table 8: Qualitative and thematic findings

Theme	Illustrative evidence from interviews	Meaning for engagement
Clear expectations and feedback	P1: clear targets improve engagement. P2: regular feedback keeps focus. P3: recognition encourages commitment.	Direction, feedback and recognition strengthen mental involvement.
Timeliness of appraisal	P5: delays in appraisal can cause loss of momentum.	Delayed review reduces the immediate motivational value of PMS.
Development and preparation	P4: review meetings highlight strengths and weaknesses. P6: training recommendations improve preparedness. P7: If the system included more personalised development plans, I would be more mentally involved.	Performance review can identify development needs and improve readiness.
Continuous feedback	P8: feedback is needed beyond annual reviews.	Ongoing feedback supports continuous learning and attention.
Reducing bureaucracy	P9: reducing bureaucracy would help personnel remain focused.	Complex processes can weaken the practical value of PMS.

Source: Key Informant Interviews.

The interviews with nine participants provided contextual explanations for the quantitative result. Three broad themes were prominent: clarity of expectations, feedback and recognition; delays and inconsistency in appraisal; and the need for personalised development and less bureaucracy.

Participants consistently associated cognitive engagement with knowing what is expected, receiving information about performance and having effort recognised. These accounts complement the survey result by explaining why PMS may influence mental focus. Participants also pointed to weaknesses in implementation. Delays in appraisal can make performance information less useful because employees may not receive guidance when it is needed. Similarly, feedback limited to formal review periods may reduce opportunities for immediate correction and learning.

The interviews further indicated that development-oriented performance management is valued. Training

recommendations arising from reviews can help personnel prepare for tasks and strengthen their sense that appraisal is intended to improve performance rather than simply record it. Participants therefore favoured personalised development plans, more frequent performance discussions and simpler administrative procedures.

Discussion of Findings

The quantitative and qualitative findings point in the same direction: PMS is positively associated with cognitive engagement among NIS personnel. The strong coefficient ($\beta = 0.928$) and high explanatory value ($R^2 = 0.859$) indicate that PMS is an important factor in the model. The interviews add practical meaning to the statistical result by identifying clarity, feedback and recognition as visible mechanisms through which personnel remain mentally involved.

The findings are consistent with Awan et al. (2020), who found that effective PMS can improve engagement and performance. They also support Govender and Bussin (2020), who emphasised continuous communication and feedback, and Alsuwaidi et al. (2021), who associated fair appraisal with stronger motivation and commitment. The findings also fit the JD-R theory: performance planning, monitoring, feedback and development can function as job resources that help employees deal with demanding work and sustain engagement.

At the same time, the qualitative evidence shows that PMS effectiveness depends on implementation. A system that exists formally but is delayed, inconsistent or excessively bureaucratic may not provide the psychological resources employees need. Thus, the study's central message is not simply that PMS should exist, but that it should operate consistently, fairly and in a timely manner.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of Performance Management Systems on cognitive engagement among personnel of the Nigeria Immigration Service, Lagos State Command. The findings demonstrate a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between PMS and cognitive engagement. The path coefficient of 0.928 and R^2 of 0.859 show that PMS is strongly associated with the mental focus, attention and involvement of personnel in their duties.

The findings also indicate that performance management is more than an administrative exercise. Clear performance objectives can help personnel understand what is expected; monitoring can identify performance gaps and provide opportunities for correction; and feedback can support learning and improvement. Recognition also emerged from the interviews as an important factor that can reinforce commitment and mental involvement.

However, the study identified implementation challenges. Delays in appraisal, irregular feedback and bureaucratic procedures can weaken the benefits of PMS. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of a performance management system depends not only on its design but also on how consistently and promptly it is implemented. In a paramilitary environment, where personnel must remain attentive and make sound decisions, the quality of performance management has implications for both employee engagement and operational effectiveness.

Recommendations

First, NIS management should ensure that performance targets are clearly established and communicated to personnel. Specific and understandable objectives can reduce uncertainty and help officers direct their attention towards priority responsibilities.

Second, performance feedback should be made more frequent and continuous rather than concentrated around annual or periodic appraisal exercises. Supervisors should use feedback to identify strengths, correct gaps and provide practical guidance while work is still in progress.

Third, delays and unnecessary bureaucracy in appraisal should be reduced. A performance review that arrives long after the relevant work has been completed may have less value for learning and correction. Simplifying administrative steps can make the system more responsive to operational realities.

Policy Implications

The findings have direct policy implications for the management of the Nigeria Immigration Service. First, PMS policy and practice should require clear performance expectations, timely monitoring and continuous feedback so that personnel receive performance information while it remains useful for learning and correction. Second, supervisors and human resource managers should treat performance management as an ongoing process rather than a periodic administrative exercise, with responsibility for reducing avoidable delays and maintaining consistency across units. Third, senior management should monitor the implementation of PMS across the Command and use the information generated through appraisal to strengthen accountability, employee support and operational effectiveness.

For supervisors, this means making performance discussions regular and useful rather than waiting for formal appraisal periods. For human resource managers, appraisal information should be used to identify performance gaps and guide appropriate development support. For senior management, the policy priority is to reduce unnecessary administrative delays and ensure that PMS practices are implemented consistently across units.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study contributes empirical evidence on PMS and cognitive engagement within a Nigerian paramilitary organisation. It extends discussion beyond general employee engagement by focusing on mental concentration, attention and intellectual involvement. It also combines quantitative modelling with interview evidence, identifying clarity, feedback and recognition as practical factors that can strengthen cognitive engagement.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

The study was limited to the Lagos State Command of the Nigeria Immigration Service. Although the Command provides an important setting for examining performance management in a security environment, findings may not automatically represent personnel in other commands or other paramilitary organisations. Future research should therefore consider multiple NIS commands and, where appropriate, comparative studies involving other security agencies.

A second limitation is the study's focus on cognitive engagement. Employee engagement also includes emotional and physical dimensions. Further studies could examine whether PMS has similar effects on these dimensions and whether the dimensions interact in predicting employee performance.

Future researchers could also introduce additional variables such as leadership style, organisational culture, technology, employee readiness or perceived organisational support. Such variables may help explain why PMS produces stronger engagement outcomes in some settings than others.

The study also has implications for future research design. The very high R^2 value reported in the model

indicates strong explanatory power within the study setting, but it should be interpreted alongside the study's single-command scope and cross-sectional design. Future studies using longitudinal data, multiple commands or additional explanatory variables could test whether the relationship remains similarly strong in different contexts.

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