

## **Effects of the Upward Influence Strategies on the Communication Media Selection**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In asymmetric interpersonal relationships between a manager and the employee, the media selection behavior under formal or informal context is likely influenced by the upward influence strategy of an employee. According to increasing the usage of online communication media such as electronic mail, internet bulletin board, and chat software and so forth, the styles of media selection have been also changed. Although many studies related to the usage of offline-oriented communication methodologies in organization, have been performed, there must not be enough studies for media selection behavior in online and offline circumstances.

This study investigates the relevance between the upward influence tactics and the media selection behaviors in specific circumstances like benevolence and conflict. The research findings indicate the rational strategy person usually prefers FTF(face-to-face) communication to others under benevolent and informal/formal context. On the other hand, the soft strategy person more often makes choices the documented communication, as one of asynchronous media. But, under the conflict context, there were no difference between groups in media selection behavior.

We conclude that the media selection behavior will be affected by the personal upward influence strategy and the interpersonal relationship. This implication can give contribution to the organizations considering how to improve the effectiveness in upward and downward communication.

Keywords: Upward Influence Strategy, Media Selection Theory, Formal/Informal Communication, Synchronous/Asynchronous Media

## INTRODUCTION

The S-M-C-R model, as communication model in organization, identifies transmitting and receiving processes from original source to the final receiver of messages. In other words, messages to be sent are encoded into document or verbal expression and delivered to the target receiver via proper channels. The receiver grasps the meaning of the received and decoded messages through media channels. And then, the receiver sends appropriate reply to the sender (Hanson, 2002).

Under the specific organizational context, the amicable communications among workers have influence upon improving the effectiveness and performance of organization. And the formal, hierarchical, and planned communications can play a role that organizational members enable to improve the productivity and the efficiency of tasks (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976). For the purpose of the amicable communication, organizational individuals have to choose the proper media, the traditional media or the online media, for their own intention and communicate each other. The processes of determining which media is the best one become important viewpoint for efficient communication (Daft et al., 1987).

The communication activities can be defined as the process to exchange of meaning, in this point of view, the relationship among members should also be considered as one of crucial factors (Cho et al., 2003; Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976). Especially, the subordinate communication skills depend upon the contextual variables and usually affect the media choice behaviors (D'Ambra & Rice, 1994; Lengel & Daft, 1988).

According to the previous research, if occurring task conflicts at the working field, organization can take higher performance by appropriate coordination procedures. But, if being relationship conflicts, the organizational performance will be relatively declined (Peterson & Behfar, 2003). The diverse interpersonal conflicts that take place in

organization can be identified with the collision motivated by individuals (Hanson, 2002).

The media used for corresponding with individuals may be classified into two types, synchronous and asynchronous media, by time difference from sending to receiving. In case of synchronous media, there will be little time difference between the transmission and the receipt of messages. On the contrary, the asynchronous media have characteristics with big time difference in feedback after transmission (Cho et al., 2004; Kang & Kim, 1995).

The goal of this paper conducted with empirical survey research is to investigate the relationship between upward influence strategies and media selection behaviors in asymmetric personal relation in organizations. The major assumption for this research was on the basis of the propositions that upward influence strategies of subordinate can affect the behaviors of media choice. In addition, we would discuss the importance of relationships in formal and informal circumstances on this topic.

We believe that the implications from research findings can give contribution to the organizations considering how to improve the effectiveness of vertical communication and further whole organizational performance.

## **THE ORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Media Selection Theory**

As given the importance of both communication and media selection in organizations, researchers have been increasingly interested in these topics and provided lots of research models. Many researchers have focused on media richness and social influence theory (Timmerman, 2003; Carlson & Davis, 1998). According to researchers who supported the media richness theory, the criteria of media selection depend upon complexity and richness of media (Daft et al., 1987). In other words, the more complex messages like numerical and formula expressions or the more ambiguous messages are, the richer media tend to be chosen (D'Ambra & Rice, 1994; Lengel & Daft, 1988).

In contrast, by social influence theory, not only the traits of media and messages but also the level of social interaction can affect the basic criteria for media selection and perceptual degree (Fulk, 1993). Thus, in social influence theory, there are three factors that have influence on the preference of media use. The first factor consists of the individual communication behaviors, perceptual degree and attitudes toward media. The

second factor includes the personal capability of media usage. And the third factor, the contextual factors such as understandability of media, easy-to-access to media, and geographical distance and so forth can be direct restrictions in media choice behaviors (Fulk et al., 1990)

**Upward Influence Strategies**

Influence strategies referred to the content and structure of the communications utilized by a source in his or her influence attempts with targets (Frazier & Summers, 1984). For this, to conduct the successful task fulfillment, the efficient communication skills among individuals play a crucial role in organization. The major subjects of communication can be classified into two parts such as transmitter who originate and send a message and receiver who accept and analyzed the message received from originator. A transmitter delivering a message with his/her intention is an influencing person to opposite side, vice versa; a receiver accepting a message from originator will be the influenced person. Generally, there may be lots of forms such as superior and inferior, peers, business partners, etc. in relationship between influencing and influenced person (Porter et al., 1981; Terpstra-tong & Ralston, 2002). This study limited on only upward influence strategies from inferior to superior.

In hard strategy, as seen in Table 1, three tactics consist of assertiveness, upward appeal, and coalitions. The soft strategy includes ingratiation and exchange of mutual benefits. As the last dimension, there is rationality in the rational strategy (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985). In the previous research, some research findings suggest that upward influence strategies will be dependent upon the superior’s leadership or personal traits (Cable & Judge, 2003; Deluga, 1988).

Table 1 Upward Influence Strategy (Kipnis & Schmidt, 1985)

Strategies	Tactics	Descriptions
Hard	Assertiveness	Actions such as order, repeatedly demand, remind or keep checking up or sets a deadline for compliance
	Upward appeal	Seek support from the target’s higher-up
	Coalitions	Gain support from others to back up one’s request
Soft	Ingratiation	Wait for a good time when the target is in good mood before seeking compliance
	Exchange of benefits	Offer an exchange of help that includes offer to make a personal sacrifice or personal favors
Rational	Rationality	Use logical arguments and reasons to convince the target to comply

### Synchronicity of Media

As seen in Table 2, synchronous media simultaneously communicating, real time communication, between both sides such as multi chat room, one-to-one chat/messenger, and face-to-face and so on are in general. In asynchronous media, electronic mail, online bulletin board, and document report can be included (Kang & Kim, 1995).

In our study, we decided document report and electronic mail as asynchronous media and online one-to-one chat and face-to-face as synchronous media based on the frequency of usage.

Table 2 Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Communication Media

Comm. mode	Media	Descriptions
Asynchronous	Bulletin board, electronic mail, paper report	Asynchronous communication between receiving and sending(no real time, big time gap)
Synchronous	Multi-chatting, online 1:1 chat, face-to-face	Synchronous communication between receiving and sending(real time, no time gap)

### Formal and Informal Communication

For a working day in organization, almost managers consume 75 percent of their time for communicating with followers, subordinates, and other members (Mintzberg, 1973). The communication activities can be the context-sensitive behaviors whether the formal or the informal situation (see Table 3). Under the circumstances of task-oriented or formal purpose, generally, the major subjects who deliver messages can be determined by his/her roles or positions and have used media types such as official document, letter(mail or email), on and offline bulletin board. But, in non-task oriented or informal situations, the subjects distributing messages are hardly dependent upon lower or higher position than them (Kang & Kim, 1995).

Table 3 Formal vs. Informal Communication

Items	Formal	Informal
Subject	Related to the position & roles in organization	Non-related to the position & roles in organization
Media types	Official document, letter, board etc.	Dialog, friendly talk, face-to-face, calls, etc.

Table 3 Formal vs. Informal Communication (Continued)

Items	Formal	Informal
Place	Working places like department, office	Non-working places like rest room, corridor
Time	During working time	After work, coffee break time
Direction	Hierarchical, top-down	Horizontal
Message types	Task-oriented	Non-task-oriented
Message traits	Official, obligatory	Private, emotional, one time
Message writing	Preparation, contemplation	Immediate, flexible, informal
Formation	Written language, direct expression	Spoken language, metaphorical

Based on the above theoretical background, this research suggested the following hypotheses to investigate the theme of paper.

H1: In formal situations, there will be the difference in the media choice among groups with each of upward influence strategies.

H1a: Under formal-friendly relationships with superior, there will be the difference in synchronous or asynchronous media choice among groups with hard, soft and rational strategy respectively.

H1b: Under formal-conflict relationships with superior, there will be the difference in synchronous or asynchronous media choice among groups with hard, soft and rational strategy respectively.

H2: In informal situations, there will be the difference in the media choice among groups with each of upward influence strategies.

H2a: Under informal-friendly relationships with superior, there will be the difference in synchronous or asynchronous media choice among groups with hard, soft and rational strategy respectively.

H2b: Under informal-conflict relationships with superior, there will be the difference in synchronous or asynchronous media choice among groups with hard, soft and rational strategy respectively.

H3: When the subordinate ask higher authority to help, there will be the difference in synchronous or asynchronous media choice among groups with hard, soft and rational strategy respectively.

H4: As the formality of situations changes, the effect of upward influence strategies on the media choice will change.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Model and Variables

We proposed the research model, as shown in figure 1, based on the proposition that, according to context like formal and informal situation, media selection behaviors can be affected. Our research model has the upward influence strategy, as predictors, and media selection behavior in various situations, as dependent variables. Respondents rated the degree to measures for independent and dependent variables adapted the response scale with 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). To measure the propensity in upward influence strategy, the independent variables such as hard, soft, and rational tactics were dealt with nominal values. Upward influence strategies were measured with the questionnaires in 1985 developed by Kipnis and Schmidt. On the basis of synchronicity of media, dependent variables were divided into asynchronous and synchronous media. Here, the hard strategy group include three tactics such as assertiveness, upward appeal, and coalitions. And the soft group has two types of tactics like ingratiation and exchange of benefits. In addition, the rational group has the rationality tactics of upward influence strategies.

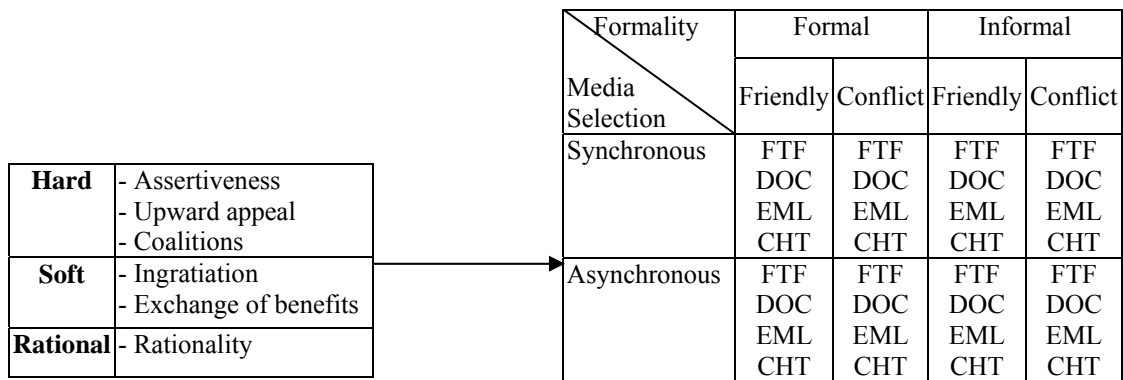


Figure 1 Research model

Note: FTF: face to face, DOC: document, EML: email, CHT: online chatting

## Sampling

The survey respondents were extracted from MBA students of three like H, K, S-university. Almost all the target respondents had their own job and engaged in diverse industries. We estimated them as proper subjects for the goal of study. To increase the respondent rate, the survey had been conducted at shortly before and after lecture. Totally, 220 responded questionnaires were collected and 212 questionnaires except for 8 improper questionnaires were analyzed.

The average age was 33.4 years-old and the range of age was from 22 to 58 years old. The average length of service in current work place was 6.9 years and the period range of current position was from 0.2 to 23 years. Number of male of all respondents was 155(73.5%) and female was 56(26.5%). Distributed positions of respondents sequentially consisted of staffs (47.4%), managers (37.8%), director (11%), and others (3.8%).

## RESULTS

### Reliability of Measures

In the survey, each variables for measuring tactics including in upward influence strategies had Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 (see Table 4.) and showed internal consistency reliability in the scales for five except for the upward appeal persuasion (Nunnally, 1978). The reliability coefficients, Cronbach's alpha, regarding upward influence strategies were  $\alpha = 0.7848$  for hard,  $\alpha = 0.7673$  for soft, and  $\alpha = 0.7741$  for rational persuasive strategy, thus the measures showed internal consistency reliability for the scales.

Table 4 Reliability of measures

Strategies		Cronbach's $\alpha$	
Hard	Assertiveness	0.7599	0.7848
	Upward appeal	0.6976	
	Coalitions	0.7940	
Soft	Ingratiation	0.7787	0.7673
	Exchange of benefits	0.8097	
Rationality	Rational	0.7741	0.7741



### Correlation between Upward Influence Strategy and Media Selection

Sixty respondents (28.3%) of total respondents were for hard strategy, sixty-six (31.1%) for soft strategy, and eighty-six (40.6%) for rational strategy people. The result of correlation analysis between upward influence strategies and media selection behaviors was same as shown in table 5. The assertiveness favored group among tactics showed the positive relationship with FTF under formal/informal relationship ( $r=.257$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $r=.141$ ,  $p<.01$ ). And the persuasive people of upward appeal illustrated similar correlative relationship with people of coalition or exchange of benefits, especially, in documenting report and online one-to-one chat. The upward appeal people showed weak positive relationship but statistically significant in usage of electronic mail under informal/friendly situation ( $r=.160$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

Table 5 Correlation coefficients between upward influence tactics and media selection

Variables			Tactics					
			Assertiveness	Upward appeal	Coalitions	Ingratiation	Reciprocal benefits	Rational
Formal	Friend	FTF	0.075	-0.035	-0.036	<b>.160*</b>	-0.111	<b>0.302**</b>
		DOC	0.103	<b>0.289**</b>	<b>0.229**</b>	0.101	<b>0.263**</b>	0.078
		EML	-0.020	0.103	0.126	0.135	0.130	<b>0.194**</b>
		CHT	0.000	<b>0.155*</b>	<b>0.226**</b>	<b>.150*</b>	<b>0.324**</b>	-0.034
	Conflict	FTF	<b>0.257**</b>	-0.013	0.039	<b>.210**</b>	-0.019	<b>0.201**</b>
		DOC	0.044	<b>0.244**</b>	<b>0.306**</b>	<b>.173*</b>	<b>0.294**</b>	0.120
		EML	0.025	0.115	0.057	0.064	0.049	<b>0.193**</b>
		CHT	0.029	<b>.155*</b>	<b>0.190**</b>	<b>.150*</b>	<b>0.286**</b>	-0.079
Informal	Friend	FTF	0.052	-0.016	-0.056	0.095	-0.036	<b>0.320**</b>
		DOC	0.100	<b>0.307**</b>	<b>0.227**</b>	<b>.205**</b>	<b>0.340**</b>	0.023
		EML	0.047	<b>.160*</b>	0.114	0.139	0.106	0.098
		CHT	0.097	<b>.167*</b>	<b>0.211**</b>	0.134	<b>0.216**</b>	0.004
	Conflict	FTF	<b>0.141*</b>	0.056	0.021	0.126	0.013	<b>0.218**</b>
		DOC	0.017	<b>0.291**</b>	<b>0.256**</b>	0.130	<b>0.278**</b>	0.048
		EML	-0.027	0.132	<b>0.172*</b>	0.121	0.073	<b>0.182*</b>
		CHT	0.006	<b>0.208**</b>	<b>0.175*</b>	0.128	<b>0.262**</b>	-0.017

Remark: two-tailed test, FTF:face-to-face, DOC: document, EML: e-mail, CHT: online chatting

Coalitions persuasive group showed the positive relationship with electronic mail ( $r=.172$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Under formal situation, people who showed the friendly relationship tends to prefer FTF or one-to-one online chat to other media but, under informal/friendly situation, has the positive relationship with document report ( $r=.205$ ,  $p<.01$ ). In the

situation of formal, the rational-focused group statistically related to the FTF and electronic mail. Here, with regard to the upward appeal, coalitions, reciprocal benefits, those groups have the statistical significant relationship with document report and one-to-one online chat. On the other hand, rational-oriented group has relationship with FTF and electronic mail under almost of all situations.

### Hypothesis Test Results

Table 6 shows the one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the mean values among groups pursuing three upward influence strategies such as hard, soft, and rational.

Table 6 ANOVA Results between groups in media selection

Variables			Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Significant	
Formal	Friend	FTF	b-g*	20.206	2	10.103	6.228	0.002
			w-g*	335.775	207	1.622		
			Total	355.981	209			
		DOC	b-g	4.984	2	2.492	1.232	0.294
			w-g	376.254	186	2.023		
			Total	381.238	188			
		EML	b-g	5.234	2	2.617	1.838	0.162
			w-g	267.75	188	1.424		
			Total	272.984	190			
		CHT	b-g	8.003	2	4.002	2.302	0.103
			w-g	319.815	184	1.738		
			Total	327.818	186			
	Conflict	FTF	b-g	4.376	2	2.188	1.446	0.238
			w-g	308.619	204	1.513		
			Total	312.995	206			
		DOC	b-g	3.151	2	1.576	0.667	0.514
w-g			436.907	185	2.362			
Total			440.059	187				
EML		b-g	8.425	2	4.213	2.511	0.084	
		w-g	315.365	188	1.677			
		Total	323.791	190				
CHT		b-g	7.476	2	3.738	2.399	0.094	
		w-g	283.573	182	1.558			
		Total	291.049	184				
Informal	Friend	b-g	30.093	2	15.047	7.803	0.001	
		w-g	399.164	207	1.928			
		Total	429.257	209				

Table 6 ANOVA Results between groups in media selection (Continued)

Variables			Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Significant	
Informal	Friend	b-g	8.951	2	4.475	4.450	0.013	
		w-g	188.044	187	1.006			
		Total	196.995	189				
		EML	b-g	4.874	2	2.437	0.967	0.382
			w-g	471.236	187	2.52		
			Total	476.111	189			
	CHT	b-g	6.729	2	3.364	2.287	0.104	
		w-g	275.087	187	1.471			
		Total	281.816	189				
	Conflict	FTF	b-g	10.04	2	5.02	3.024	0.051
			w-g	341.96	206	1.66		
			Total	352	208			
DOC		b-g	2.412	2	1.206	0.992	0.373	
		w-g	226.233	186	1.216			
		Total	228.646	188				
EML		b-g	6.377	2	3.188	1.304	0.274	
		w-g	462.29	189	2.446			
	Total	468.667	191					
CHT	b-g	5.517	2	2.758	1.674	0.190		
	w-g	304.84	185	1.648				
	Total	310.356	187					

\*) b-g: between groups, w-g: within groups

### Difference of Media Usage in Formal and Friendly Relations (H1a)

Based on the results from the analysis, under formal and friendly relations, there was statistically significant in usage of FTF communication in significant level 1%. ( $F=6.228$ ,  $p\text{-value}=0.002 < .01$ ). But, other media like document report, electronic mail, and online one-to-one communication did not reveal the significant difference among groups. The result of Post-hoc testing by Scheffe and Bonferroni revealed that the rational persuasion group ( $\mu_3=3.37$ ) prefer FTF communication to other groups such as hard ( $\mu_1=2.66$ ) and soft ( $\mu_2=2.85$ ) strategic group. Thus Hypothesis H1a was supported.

### Difference of Media Usage in Formal and Conflict Relations (H1b)

Under formal and conflict relation, there was not statistical significant difference among usage of four media types. In conflict relationship between a superior and a

inferior, the result showed no difference in usage of synchronous and asynchronous media. Therefore hypothesis H1b was not statistically supported.

### **Difference of Media Usage in Informal and Friendly Relations (H2a)**

With the significant level 1 and 5 per cent, in informal and friendly relation, there was difference in use of FTF ( $F=7.803$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.001<.01$ ) and document report among groups ( $F=4.450$ ,  $p\text{-value}=.013<.05$ ). Namely, The rational group ( $\mu_3=3.56$ ) compared with hard ( $\mu_1=2.69$ ) and soft group ( $\mu_2=2.91$ ) tend to use more FTF communication than other media. This result implies that, in order to attain the agreeable opinion from his or her superior, they mainly use FTF to logically explain the reason why they need and to suggest information regarding their own assertion. Also, the soft group ( $\mu_2=3.26$ ) compared with others (hard:  $\mu_1=3.04$  and rational group:  $\mu_3=2.75$ ) used to choose more document report communication than other media. This indicates that, before requesting permission for their opinion, the soft group people wait for becoming good mood of superior or friendly act. Moreover, with paying for permission and favor, they give an appointment like personal sacrifice for another duties for superior. Based on intrinsic characteristics of this group, the result can be reasonable. Thus, hypothesis H2a was supported.

### **Difference of Media Usage in Informal and Conflict Relations (H2b)**

The same as formal situation, under informal and conflict relations, there was no difference in use of media among upward influence groups. So hypothesis H2b was not supported.

### **Difference of Media Choice When Ask for Help from Higher Authority(H3)**

The analyzed result revealed that when they ask for help from higher authority than superior, there was significant difference among groups in media choice (see Table 7). The rational group mostly use FTF communication, in contrast, the soft persuasive group use less than other groups. Thus, hypothesis H3 was partly supported.

Table 7 Media selection for asking help from higher authority

Variables		Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Significance
FTF	Between groups	25.938	2	12.969	7.462	0.001
	Within groups	352.824	203	1.738		
	Total	378.762	205			
DOC	Between groups	3.306	2	1.653	1.269	0.284
	Within groups	239.646	184	1.302		
	Total	242.952	186			
EML	Between groups	9.943	2	4.972	1.828	0.164
	Within groups	505.972	186	2.72		
	Total	515.915	188			
CHT	Between groups	2.561	2	1.281	0.836	0.435
	Within groups	275.745	180	1.532		
	Total	278.306	182			

#### Effects of changes the formality of situations on the relationship between upward influence strategies and the media choice (H4)

Figure 2 shows H4 was supported. Under the informal and friendly relationship, hard strategy and soft strategy group show that they mostly use the documentation for the reciprocal communication. Not related with the formality of situations, however, the result shows that the rational strategic group makes usual use of face-to-face against document-oriented communication. Therefore, the hypothesis, H4: as the formality of situations changes, the effect of upward influence strategies on the media choice will change, was supported. Table 8 shows the results of hypothesis test.

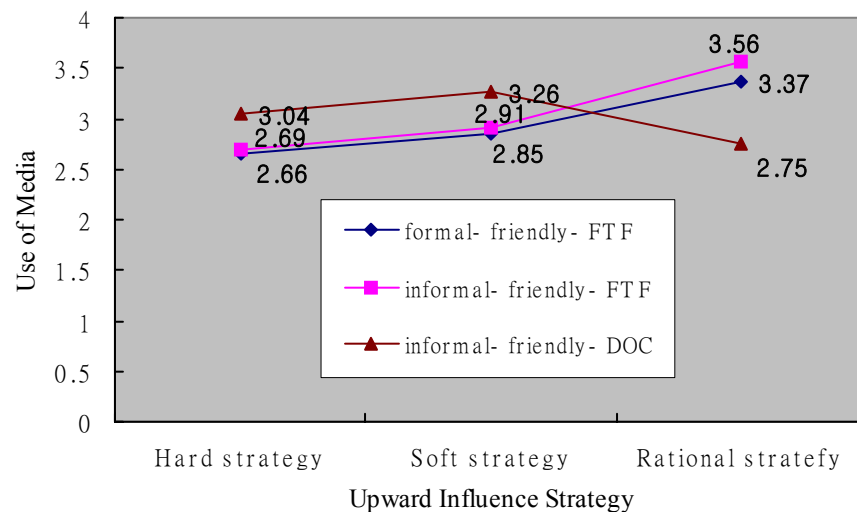


Figure 2 Effects of changes in the formality of communications on the impact of influence strategies on media selection (significant difference among groups)

Table 8 Hypothesis test results

Situation/relationship		Significant difference	Media	Results
Formal	Friend	O	FTF	H1a: supported
	Conflict	X		H1b: not supported
Informal	Friend	O	DOC FTF	H2a: supported
	Conflict	X		H2b: not supported
Higher Authority		O	FTF	H3: supported
Formality changes		O	FTF, DOCH4	H4: supported

## CONCLUSION

In general organizations, the strategies of communication in interpersonal relationship have significant influence on improving the organizational and the managerial effectiveness. Especially, under the formal or the informal situation in working fields, the studies regarding the relationship between upward influence strategies and media selection preference of a subordinate must be a crucial research motivation to improve the effectiveness in coming to understanding. Generally, the communication skills and strategies that a middle person communicates with superiors for the purpose of gaining their needs can affect the performance of team as well as whole organization (Chacko, 1990).

The upward influence tactics are able to affect the communication behaviors among members in intra-organization or inter-organization (Farmer et al., 1997). Moreover, there were some studies that the subordinate's assertiveness can give an unfavorable impression to his/her superior or bring about the negative effect in organizational performance (Rao et al., 1995). On the other side, according to the increase of usage of the traditional communication media (face-to-face, document report, calling, and mailing and so forth) as well as internet media (e-mail, chatting, and internet bulletin board), the study focused on relationship between the upward influence strategies and preference of media selection can have an valuable meaning. Thus, we conducted the empirical research with questionnaires for investigating the difference of media preference among groups having different strategies.

As a consequence, under formal and friendly relationship between both sides, there was significant difference among groups in media selection for communication. Namely, the group pursuing rationality frequently used more face-to-face communication than other groups in both formal-friendly and the informal-friendly relationship. By contrast, soft strategy group of upward influence showed that they mainly communicated with his/her superior by document report. But, in the conflicted relationship in both formal and informal, there was no statistically significant difference between groups.

Some limitations of this study exist. First, as a contingent factor to classify the media behavior, we used only four constructs from the combinations of formal/informal-friend/conflicted relationship. As the diversity of task, however, can affect media selection behaviors (Donabedian et al., 1998), the further study considering the traits of subordinate's tasks should be conducted. Second, the subordinate's position in an organization also has an influence on media preference. In other words, factors, such as the capability of media usage, understandability of media and so on, should be considered as mediated variables (Carlson & Davis, 1998). Third, variables like the complexity and characteristics of report did not considered in this study. Moreover, because influence behavior was not manipulated, causality can only be inferred from the results of the survey (Su, 2003).

In summary, our findings support the previous results concluding that the criteria of media choices depend upon the complexity of messages and the media richness in media richness theory (D'Ambra & Rice, 1994; Lengel & Daft, 1988). And, in social influence theory, these results show the consistent outcomes that social interaction among coworkers may influence choice of media as well as use (Fulk, 1993). We believe that the research results can deliver some implications for the purpose of improving effective communications among intra- and inter-organizational members.

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