



## SOCIAL FACILITATION IN SPORT

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### **Abstract:**

### **Introduction:**

Social facilitation is a psychological term used in social psychology. Present research paper reviews the collective body of research which has been termed "social facilitation" by Allport in 1924, and suggests ways in which the theory can be adopted in practice for athletes, coaches and sport psychologists. Social facilitation research may be classified in terms of two experimental paradigms i.e. the extent to which the actions and presence of other competitors which is called "coactions effects" and the actions and the presence of non-competitors which is called "audience effects" influence an individual's learning or motor performance in front of a home crowd.

There are some factors add pressure on athlete like frequency and duration of exposure, types of crowds i.e. talented or knowledgeable people versus an audience largely ignorant of the intricacies of the performance, size of audience and atmosphere of venue etc.

Many psychologists supported that an excess anxiety can lead to poor performance. Such pioneering work demonstrated that the presence of another contestant improved subjects' performance (Triplett, 1897).

Another related area of the social facilitation research examines the effect on performance of playing in front of a home crowd. Borden (1980) stated that athletes' perception of the relationship between themselves and the audience have been recognized as a factor contributing to the performance level.

The strength and consistency of the advantage has been found to differ across and within sports, with relevant factors being identified as crowd size, and behavior, familiarity with the venue, the rules of the game, travel, and the competitors' and officials' psychological behavioral states (Courneya& Carron, 1992).

In our day-to-day life too we eat more food with friends than alone. An individual may work more with group members than a single individual. Students study hard for longer time in study room with classmates as compared to alone in single room. In brief social facilitation is important to sport related activities.

Borden (1980) discovered the substitution of "motivation" for "drive" in the Drive Theory is a useful extension to the model and provides impetus for a range of new sport psychology research and practices, including establishing levels of commitment to the task and teaching appropriate and realistic goal-setting strategies. Social facilitation is referred as the general phenomenon in which physical and cognitive performance is improved when an individual is being observed. Psychologists use this term to indicate that individual's performance is sometimes facilitated while being observed, and other times inhibited in the presence of others. The concept of social facilitation involves the "effect of the presence of others on human task performance and physiology" (Bond & Titus, 1983, pg. 265). (7)

The application of the findings of research on social facilitation is significant in the sports psychology field. Sports

psychologists use this knowledge of social facilitation theory to devise various methods to improve physical performance in observed domains by following the prediction that when athletes are competing against a clock or their own time, performance will be worse compared to environments in which athletes are competing against a present other and also that games which spectators may produce better performance than games with no spectators. Based on the mechanisms of social facilitation, some psychologists argue that competing in the presence of a home crowd increases one's level of self-consciousness can produce performance, which would not be the case for the visiting team (3).

Even though social facilitation has been a commonly studied phenomenon in social psychology; Triplett (1898) was the first to notice effect of the presence of others on task performance. Through the studies of bike race performance and children winding a fishing reel, Triplett noted that "individuals tended to perform better in the presence of others when compared to performing the same task in isolation" (4). Zajonc tried to explain the phenomenon through drive theory. Zajonc (1965) proposed a hypothesis that if an audience is present when an individual is performing a task, then the dominant or typical response is facilitated. His theory of social facilitation has been tested dynamically in many areas involving performance in the presence of others. In his study, Zajonc states that the audience induces arousal in the athletes, which then leads to these athletes performing the dominant response.

#### **Literature Review:**

Social facilitation refers to the impact on performance created by an atmosphere of social evaluation (Landers & McCullagh, 1976). (6) Landers & McCullagh (1976) describe this in simpler terms as "the mere presence of other people enhancing the performance of speed and accuracy in well-practiced tasks, but degrading the performance of less familiar tasks". (6)

Allport (1924), Bergum & Lehr (1963), Dashiell (1930) and Travis (1925) conducted a number of studies to investigate the idea of social facilitation by having participants' complete tasks in the presence of others. Allport (1924) noted an effect of audience presence on performance and concluded that co-workers facilitate tasks particularly when the tasks are well learned. In their study, Bergum and Lehr (1963) found that following an intensive training session, trainees of National Guard showed higher accuracy in indicating failures in sequenced light signals when they thought they were being observed compared to when they were alone. On the contrary, some studies of social facilitation revealed a dissimilar finding about performance facilitation under audience conditions that audiences had a detrimental effect on performance (e.g., Husband, 1931; Pessin, 1933; Pessin & Husband; 1933) (1).

In a study 'Valence of anticipated evaluation and social facilitation' conducted by Lawrence J Sanna and R. Lance Shotland of The Pennsylvania State University USA (1990), "Subjects expecting to perform successfully anticipated a positive evaluation from an audience, resulting in improved performance over subjects working alone. Conversely, when subjects expected to perform poorly a negative evaluation was anticipated from an audience, although in the overall analysis social performance decrements did not reach significance. However, a comparison with a performance baseline condition, and a reanalysis of data from subjects who did not receive preliminary performance feedback, indicated that both social facilitation and impairment effects were evident". (1)

Another study which examined the effect of virtual social facilitation and competitiveness on exercise effort in exergaming older adults; Cay Anderson-Hanley, Amanda L Snyder, Joseph P Nimon, and Paul J Arciero commented that "The social presence of another individual when completing an exercise task is believed to sharpen one's competitive instincts. The generalized drive hypothesis provides evidence to suggest that social facilitation

increases one's innate internal drive and activation level, which are found to be elevated in competitive environments". They hypothesized that that "a variety of factors could moderate the effect of social facilitation in exergaming and, if not taken into consideration, the effect could appear dampened". However, in their study of social facilitation; Bond C. and Titus L. (1982) found that "social presence typically leads only to small effects".(1)

Russell, Gordon W. (1983) investigated the relationships between crowd size and density, and both player aggression (aggressive penalties) and performance (goals) and found that "the crowd size was negatively related to the aggression and performance of visiting teams while crowd density was negatively related to the overall performance of both teams". (2) The study also revealed that "the importance of a game was negatively related to home team performance and positively related to that of the visitors". (2)

The positive benefits a crowd can have on an athlete are well-known, both through research (Nevill & Holder, 1999; Schwartz & Barsky, 1977; Carron, Loughhead & Bray, 2005) and anecdotal evidence from the athletes themselves.(5) The major issue created by social facilitation is its capacity to negatively influence certain athletes (Uziel, 2002; Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter & Salomon, 1999).(5) The negative impacts of social facilitation in sport have been researched, but no single paradigm exists to help coaches and athletes understand the concept.(5) The research is tailored towards the performance outcomes of social facilitation, such as 'choking' in sport (Hill, Hanton, Matthews & Fleming, 2010). Hill et al. (2010) define the term 'choking' as a "sub-optimal performance under stressful conditions" (pg. 24). (5)

The issue is personality-specific, with the same crowd enhancing the performance of certain athletes whilst degrading the performance of others (Uziel, 2002). (5) The crowd has been shown to magnify performance pressure, which can lead to a detrimental change in the athlete's psychological state (Wallace, Baumeister & Vohs, 2005).(5) Wallace et al.

(2005) found a psychological shift from 'seeking success' to 'avoiding failure', causing poor decisions in crucial moments of a contest. (5) Nevill et al. (2002) attribute this to a subconscious need to avoid crowd displeasure. Some researchers also argued that social facilitation can also lead to increased self-monitoring in athletes, resulting in an over-cautious approach to tasks.(5)

### Conclusions:

By examining the literature it has identified those factors which affect how a person is likely to perform in front of other competitors and non-competitors.

Social facilitation research suggests to athletes, coaches, and sport psychologists ways in which an athlete may be trained both mentally & physically so that arousal levels and cognitions are recognised and monitored, and sometimes changed, thus moderating audience effects.

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