The purpose of the current study was to conceptualize how potential fans of a sport team perceive the team’s existing fan base and how the perception influences their willingness to become fans. Based on social categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and the distinctiveness effect (Nelson & Miller, 1995), we propose that potential fans psychologically classify existing fans into particular social categories depending on the relative size of the fan base in question. Specifically, if existing fans are a minority in a community, potential fans activate the fan category to understand existing fans’ behaviors and perceive a clear distinction between themselves and existing fans: “They support the team because they are fans. I am not a fan, so I do not support the team.” On the other hand, when existing fans are a majority in a community, potential fans activate the resident category and perceive supporting the team to be a norm shared by community residents: “They support the team because they are residents of the community. I am also a resident, so I should support the team.” Accordingly, we developed the following proposition:

Proposition 1: Potential fans are more willing to become fans of a sport team when existing fans are a majority rather than a minority in the community.

In addition, we propose that the homogeneity within a fan base moderates the relation between the relative size of the fan base and potential fans’ willingness to become fans. Specifically, the homogeneity within a fan base reinforces the distinction between potential fans and existing fans when existing fans are a minority in a community (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996). Hence, it is more difficult for potential fans to join a group of fans when existing fans are highly similar with one another compared to when existing fans show different characteristics. On the other hand, when existing fans are a majority in a community, the homogeneity within a fan base strengthens social pressure regarding supporting the team. Accordingly, we developed the following propositions:

Proposition 2-a: When existing fans are a minority in a community, the homogeneity within the fan base has a negative effect on potential fans’ willingness to become fans.

Proposition 2-b: When existing fans are a majority in a community, the homogeneity within the fan base has a positive effect on potential fans’ willingness to become fans.

The current study offers a theoretical explanation regarding a psychological mechanism of how potential fans are influenced by existing fans in their socialization process. This study also provides meaningful practical implications. Sport teams often show how existing fans enjoy supporting their teams. We argue that sport teams should carefully select information about existing fans so that potential fans would form a positive impression about them and decide to become fans themselves. If a sport team’s fans are a minority in a community, the homogeneity within the fan base would strengthen the distinction between existing and potential fans, and, hence, potential fans would hesitate to become fans. Thus, the team should emphasize the diversity within the fan base and openness to new fans. To do so, sport teams may show images of various fans who enjoy supporting the team in many different ways. In contrast, if a sport team’s fans are a majority in a community, the homogeneity within the fan base would reinforce social pressure for supporting the team among local residents including potential fans. Therefore, the team should emphasize similarity and togetherness among fans. Specifically, the team should show images of people wearing team-colored shirts and cheering the team together.