

Fandom

Labubu! If you have not come across the “cute, ugly or just plain weird” monster toy doll based on Hong Kong illustrator Kasing Lung’s characters and sold by China based Pop Mart, you have clearly missed the latest fandom craze that, by 2025, has managed to build a global fanbase: from celebrities and social media influencers to regular Joe Blog on the streets and children around the globe. The frenzy and fan community that Labubu has built has also made it clear in public discourses that fandom can be risky, dangerous even, and linked to overt or more hidden political agendas. The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation, for example, published a report suggesting that Labubu, along with other increasingly popular Chinese brands such as BYD, may be part of a broader Chinese strategy to exert soft power in the West (ORF 2025). The link between fandom and politics is, of course, nothing new and one can find numerous examples of encounters, clashes, and overlaps between fandom and politics, such as Taylor Swift’s endorsement of Kamala Harris and her being reprimanded for it.

Both the increasing politicization of fandom and the visibility of such politicization also needs a closer examination from a religious studies and media studies perspective. Previous discussions explored “nationalism and religion as forms of fan-based identities” (Dittmer and Bos 2019). More recent studies conceptualize fandom as a form of play and discuss to what extent fandom and religion are distinct or overlap (Davidsen 2013). To a large extent, these discussions depend on one’s definition of religion (Wolff 2023). Of interest is also the phenomenon of how politics normalizes toxic fan practices (Le Clue 2024) or how “normies” are radicalized, e.g. in the context of conspiracy theories (Reinhard et al. 2022) and the polarization in politics (Barnes 2022).

This forthcoming issue of JRFM aims to build in the existing scholarship and explore the complex and complicated entanglement between religion,

media, fandom, politics, economic interests in greater detail. With this issue, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of how religious ideas might fuel fandom practices, while avoiding (simplistic) discussions to what extent fandom might be religion or religion might be a form of fandom. We are interested in how the different forces that might drive fandom practices, e.g. economic interests, vested power interests, political agendas, might be fueled by or expressed through religious language or iconography.

In particular, we are interested in the following questions:

- How can fandom be approached from a religious studies and media studies perspective? Which concepts are helpful to understand the complex interrelation between fandom, religion and media?
- Which methodological approaches to fandom, media and religion are useful? What are their potential and limitations?
- What interrelations can be observed between fandom, religion, media and other areas of society such as art, economics, popular culture?
- How does fandom change over time? What does it mean to address these transformations from a religious studies and media studies perspective? How are religious practices affected by such transformation processes?
- What processes of politicization of fandom can be observed, and what role do media and religion play in the politization – and economic exploitation – of fandom?

Article Length

JRFM is committed to providing a space and platform to encourage discussion, but also experiment with and test out novel ideas, concepts, and theoretical frameworks. Discussion inputs and encouragements benefit from short and concise presentations of arguments and relevant data. As such, we are looking for articles of ca. 3.000 words in length. To facilitate discussions, we would ask you to include a strong thesis statement and overview of argument in the introduction. Please also include a discussion on the relevance of your argument in the conclusion.

Relevance of Argument

As Open Access journal, JRFM is committed to demonstrating to the broader scholarly community and the broader public the importance of the study of religion in what is often still perceived as an increasingly secular

society. We are therefore asking you to include a brief reflection or discussion about the relevance and importance of your argument/case study in the conclusion. In other words: we are interested in a brief discussion/statement on what it is that we can learn from looking at your topic (or fandom more generally) from a religious/media studies perspective that we might not learn otherwise. What is it that religious/media studies brings to the table to help us better understand today's increasingly fractured (and ruptured) societies and cultures.

Use of Images

JRFM encourages the use of visual material in submissions. For this issue, we particularly encourage the use of photographs as visual source and ethnographic material. Images should not serve mere illustration purposes but should be a crucial element of the argument.

Due to space constraints, we would ask authors to limit the number of photographs to a maximum of five. Photographs should ideally have been taken by the authors themselves. If they are sourced externally, authors must have permission for reproduction. As Open Access journal, JRFM does not have the financial resources to reimburse authors for any copyright fees incurred.

Deadline

The deadline for all submissions is **10 February 2026**. The publication is scheduled for 15 November 2026.

For questions regarding this call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the editors of the issue, Anna-Katharina Höpflinger (a.hoepflinger@lmu.de) and Alexander D. Ornella (alexander@ornella.at).