# Pop Mart’s Labubu dolls spark buying mania as brand goes mainstream in UK



In recent years, POP MART has emerged as a cultural sensation that extends far beyond its origins as a niche Chinese toy manufacturer. Crowds of collectors and enthusiasts gather outside the brand's dazzling flagship store on Oxford Street, eager to dive into the world of blind-box collectibles, featuring beloved characters such as Skullpanda, Dimoo, and the exceptionally popular Labubu, known for its whimsical design and charming grin. For many, these visits are not simply about shopping; they offer a unique opportunity to trade art toys, bond with fellow fans, and capture those thrilling unboxing moments for social media platforms.

Founded in Beijing in 2010, POP MART has significantly evolved since its initial inception. Its rise can be attributed to innovative character designs and collaborations with emerging artists. The brand's engaging product line engages consumers on an emotional level, delivering experiences that transcend mere aesthetics. Amy-Lee Cowey-Small, a seasoned marketing professional, aptly captures this ethos, stating, “They were never meant to be a money-making madness in a resale market, but a moment in time for adults to become childlike and silly again. Every human deserves to feel that.”

This emotional connection sets POP MART apart from traditional toymakers. It capitalises on the concept of “ritualized uncertainty” inherent in blind-box culture, wherein buyers are surprised upon opening the box—an experience that resonates powerfully with Gen Z and millennial consumers across Europe. Social media plays a vital role in this trend, as influencers proliferate unboxing videos that offer viewers a glimpse into the joy of discovery, turning these collectibles into contemporary cultural symbols. As the brand’s influence has grown, it has attracted the attention of high-profile fans, including celebrities like Madonna and British television presenter Olivia Attwood.

Since opening its first UK store in Soho in 2022, POP MART has rapidly expanded across Britain, with additional locations in Manchester, Westfield Stratford, Cambridge, and Birmingham. By the end of 2025, the company foresees operating 17 standalone stores in the UK. Notably, over 90 percent of POP MART's customer base now comprises local Britons and Europeans, dispelling any remainder of its once-niche branding. Scarlett Zhao, the head of marketing for POP MART in Europe, asserts, “This is no longer a niche brand for the Asian diaspora; we’ve gone mainstream.”

The brand's success is evident in its financial performance as well. Having doubled its sales to $1.8 billion in 2024, reaching a market valuation of $38 billion, POP MART outpaces traditional rivals like Mattel and Hasbro. High-profile endorsements—including those from global pop icons such as Rihanna and Lisa from the K-pop group Blackpink—bolster the brand’s mainstream appeal. Zhao clarified that despite speculation about limited product availability being a marketing tactic, the company's focus is on maintaining high quality and a consistent customer experience, rather than creating artificial scarcity.

While the rising popularity of POP MART's products has been a boon, it has also incited chaos in retail environments. Labubu, a quirky doll that has sparked frenzied buying behaviour, has led to scenes of mania in UK stores necessitating the brand to briefly halt its sale in the region amid safety concerns. Despite the excitement surrounding these collectibles, market experts advise that the initial frenzy may eventually cool, as seen with other trends, leading to fluctuating consumer interest.

However, POP MART is not isolated within this growing landscape of collectible brands. Similar initiatives, like TOPTOY by MINISO, are also gaining traction, albeit with a focus on licensed intellectual properties rather than original creations. As POP MART's influence spreads, it is increasingly welcomed by prominent Western retailers, marking its shift into the confident mainstream. “Today, we’re proud to be part of a new wave of cultural brands that Harrods and other top-tier retailers are embracing,” Zhao comments, reflecting the brand's evolution into a recognized name in the luxury sector.

For collectors engaged in this modern movement, the allure of POP MART goes far beyond mere toys; it embodies a lifestyle steeped in nostalgia, creativity, and community. As young adults—often referred to as “kidults”—discover joy in these compact collectibles, they are forging connections and memories rooted in a shared cultural vernacular, highlighting the enduring significance of playfulness in adult life.

As POP MART continues to develop innovative retail experiences, including a unique opportunity to shop at a location within the Louvre Museum, it is poised to solidify its stature on the global stage while enriching the cultural fabric of contemporary consumerism.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.macaubusiness.com/kidults-emotional-cravings-not-just-toys-drive-pop-marts-popularity/), [[6]](https://www.shaftesburycapital.com/en/media/shaftesburynewsarchive/2022/pop-mart-s-debut-uk-store-pops-up-in-chinatown-london-.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.macaubusiness.com/kidults-emotional-cravings-not-just-toys-drive-pop-marts-popularity/), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/cc083f49-90a5-4645-a039-0d1f88d2a0e4), [[4]](https://elpais.com/estilo-de-vida/2025-02-21/el-efecto-sonny-angel-y-el-fenomeno-en-auge-detras-de-las-blind-boxes.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.theweek.com/business/labubu-the-creepy-dolls-sparking-brawls-in-the-shops), [[5]](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/pop-mart-unveiling-an-innovative-retail-experience-at-the-louvre-302209847.html)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.macaubusiness.com/kidults-emotional-cravings-not-just-toys-drive-pop-marts-popularity/), [[3]](https://www.theweek.com/business/labubu-the-creepy-dolls-sparking-brawls-in-the-shops), [[5]](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/pop-mart-unveiling-an-innovative-retail-experience-at-the-louvre-302209847.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/cc083f49-90a5-4645-a039-0d1f88d2a0e4), [[3]](https://www.theweek.com/business/labubu-the-creepy-dolls-sparking-brawls-in-the-shops), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/cc083f49-90a5-4645-a039-0d1f88d2a0e4)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.macaubusiness.com/kidults-emotional-cravings-not-just-toys-drive-pop-marts-popularity/), [[3]](https://www.theweek.com/business/labubu-the-creepy-dolls-sparking-brawls-in-the-shops), [[7]](https://www.axios.com/local/chicago/2024/10/03/popmart-toy-store-michigan-avenue)
* Paragraph 8 – [[5]](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/pop-mart-unveiling-an-innovative-retail-experience-at-the-louvre-302209847.html), [[6]](https://www.shaftesburycapital.com/en/media/shaftesburynewsarchive/2022/pop-mart-s-debut-uk-store-pops-up-in-chinatown-london-.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.macaubusiness.com/kidults-emotional-cravings-not-just-toys-drive-pop-marts-popularity/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/cc083f49-90a5-4645-a039-0d1f88d2a0e4> - Pop Mart, a Beijing-based toy company, has achieved significant success with its collectible 'blind boxes' featuring characters like Labubu, a plush toy with rabbit ears and a mischievous grin. These toys have become a global phenomenon, especially popular among Gen Z and millennial consumers in Asia, the US, and Europe. Celebrities such as Rihanna and Lisa from Blackpink have contributed to their trendy appeal. The blind box format, in which consumers don't know which character they are buying until opening, drives repeat purchases and collecting behaviour. In 2024, Pop Mart doubled its sales to $1.8 billion while tripling its profits, pushing its market valuation to $38 billion—more than double that of US toymakers Mattel and Hasbro. Despite trading at a high price-to-earnings ratio of 33, investors remain optimistic about its long-term potential. The company's flagship character, Labubu, saw sales jump over 700%, but other lines like Molly and Skullpanda also performed strongly. With overseas sales currently accounting for just 39%, there is significant room for international expansion. Pop Mart's success exemplifies how small, innovative luxuries can thrive even in economically challenging times.
3. <https://www.theweek.com/business/labubu-the-creepy-dolls-sparking-brawls-in-the-shops> - Labubu, a quirky and slightly eerie designer doll originally created by Hong Kong artist Kasing Lung, has surged in global popularity, causing frenzied demand and even chaotic scenes in UK stores. First part of Lung's 2015 'Monsters' picture book series, Labubu became a commercial success after a 2019 deal with Chinese toy giant Pop Mart. With unique 'blind box' packaging and a design combining whimsy and creepiness, Labubu has tapped into pandemic-era nostalgia and adult toy collecting. The doll gained viral fame after Blackpink's Lalisa Manobal posted with one in 2024, sparking a Gen Z obsession. High demand has driven sales to an estimated $400 million annually for Pop Mart. Celebrity endorsements and widespread use as keychain charms further fuel its status as a must-have accessory. However, the craze has also led to counterfeits, dubbed 'Lafufu,' and even physical altercations among shoppers, prompting Pop Mart to temporarily halt UK sales due to safety concerns. Market experts caution that such hype may lead to a decline as early adopters lose interest, with some fans already distancing themselves from the now mainstream trend.
4. <https://elpais.com/estilo-de-vida/2025-02-21/el-efecto-sonny-angel-y-el-fenomeno-en-auge-detras-de-las-blind-boxes.html> - El fenómeno de las 'blind boxes' ha ganado popularidad en España desde mediados del año pasado, inicialmente impulsado por las figuritas Sonny Angel. Estas cajas sorpresa, cuyo contenido es desconocido hasta abrirlas, han captado la atención de coleccionistas y personalidades como la cantante Rosalía y el ministro de Transportes Óscar Puente. Originarias de China, han penetrado el mercado español destacándose en tiendas como Miniso y Pop Mart. El auge de las 'blind boxes' se debe en parte al confinamiento por la pandemia, el incremento del comercio electrónico y la influencia de redes sociales y videos de 'unboxing'. Esta tendencia está vinculada al coleccionismo, la búsqueda de entretenimiento y la atracción psicológica por la estética 'kawaii' (adorable), que activa los centros de placer del cerebro. Las 'blind boxes' continúan siendo populares, atrayendo a un amplio rango de edades y fomentando una cultura de intercambio y conversación.
5. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/pop-mart-unveiling-an-innovative-retail-experience-at-the-louvre-302209847.html> - POP MART proudly announced the grand opening of its new store in the Louvre, a historic first for this iconic museum, on July 27, 2024. Strategically located in the Carrousel du Louvre, near the museum's secondary entrance and the glass pyramid, the store uniquely blends classical and contemporary art. This marks POP MART's first venture into an art gallery-style retail format, featuring a design inspired by French classical architecture. Exclusive releases such as SKULLPANDA PERMEATE and Labubu's Artistic Quest celebrate this milestone opening. The opening ceremony, attended by Wang Ning, Founder and CEO of POP MART International Group, took place during the highly anticipated period, enhancing the store's visibility. Wang Ning stated, 'Opening our store at the Louvre is a significant milestone, enhancing POP MART's global stature and credibility. Recognition from the Louvre supports our European expansion.' This launch marks a key moment in POP MART's European strategy and adds a distinctive retail experience to Paris's cultural landscape.
6. <https://www.shaftesburycapital.com/en/media/shaftesburynewsarchive/2022/pop-mart-s-debut-uk-store-pops-up-in-chinatown-london-.html> - Shaftesbury has announced that leading art toy brand, POP MART, has officially opened its debut UK store at Chinatown London’s 80 Shaftesbury Avenue. POP MART are selling some of their best, latest, and most exclusive collectibles at the Chinatown London unit, many of which becoming available in the UK for the first time. The brand’s new store offers world-renowned art toy products, including collections created by famous designers Kenny, Pucky, and Kasing Lung. POP MART’s Chinatown London location offers the brand’s full line of collectibles, including its latest collection celebrating Lunar New Year. The timely Year of the Tiger range features its classic characters in traditional dress, including POP MART Molly and Skull Panda figurine. The store also offers the trademark mystery boxes, where customers can collect secret, hidden, or chase collectibles amongst regular characters.
7. <https://www.axios.com/local/chicago/2024/10/03/popmart-toy-store-michigan-avenue> - Pop Mart, a popular toy store originating from China, has opened its first Midwest location on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. The store is known for its 'blind box' concept, where buyers purchase boxes without knowing the toy inside, driving repeat purchases for unique collectibles. Since its 2010 inception, Pop Mart has gained a following for its designer toys inspired by Anime, Disney, Marvel, and other pop culture phenomena. This success ties into the 'Kidulting' trend, where adults indulge in purchasing toys reminiscent of their childhood. The new pop-up store at The Shops at North Bridge offers U.S. exclusives like the Peach Riot Frankie-Virtues Figurine and others. Pop Mart's expansion outside Asia has been attributed to their products' universal appeal, transcending national boundaries.