# Labubu dolls spark UK retail chaos and redefine adult collectible culture



When 26-year-old healthcare consultant Michelle Keller peeled open the shiny packaging of her eagerly awaited Labubu doll, a sense of triumph overwhelmed her. It was a moment after a long and chaotic hunt through the streets of central London. This chestnut-furred creature, with its distinctive freckled face, red nose, and spiky gnashers, is not just another toy; it is part of a vibrant collector culture that has taken the UK by storm. Originally launched in 2015 by Hong Kong artist Kasing Lung, the Labubu dolls have become highly sought after, especially with rising celebrity endorsements from the likes of Dua Lipa and Blackpink's Lisa, who has showcased Labubus on her social media.

Keller's excitement mirrored the growing phenomenon surrounding these dolls, aptly dubbed "The Monsters." As collectors like her scour London’s scenes for Labubus, the atmosphere in the designated Pop Mart stores is electric. Customers pack into these shops, eyes gleaming with anticipation, as they await fresh shipments of dolls. As Keller recalls, “Everyone rushed over and grabbed multiple boxes… I just made sure the child in front of me had secured one!” The scramble for these dolls highlights the growing frenzy within what has become a lucrative market—in which items originally priced around £17.50 can resell for up to £1,500.

The allure of Labubus lies not only in their aesthetic appeal—a blend of the playful and the eerie—but also in the blind box concept, which encourages relentless purchasing until the sought-after figures are attained. This mechanism taps into a broader cultural trend where consumers are increasingly drawn to collectibles that foster a sense of community and personal expression. Online forums and social media are filled with Labubu enthusiasts eager to share their latest finds, reminiscent of earlier collectable trends featuring characters like Hello Kitty and Monchichi.

Recently, Pop Mart announced it would temporarily cease selling Labubus in its physical UK stores, citing safety concerns as reports of retail chaos proliferate. Customers have been camping outside the stores, and violence has erupted as resellers aim to secure the coveted dolls for profit. This situation represents a convergence of the burgeoning "kidult" market—where adult consumers engage with products traditionally aimed at children—and the fervour of collectable culture. According to analysts, one pound in every three spent on toys in the UK is now attributed to consumers aged 18 and over.

Notably, the trend extends beyond a mere craze for toys. Many Labubu aficionados, like Keller, use these dolls as personal accessories, snapping stylish photos of them attached to designer bags. This behaviour aligns with a growing trend in fashion where luxury brands are increasingly incorporating playful elements. Designers like Miu Miu and Théophile Blandet are leading the charge, elevating plushie adornments as staples within high fashion collections, reflecting a playful juxtaposition between high-value pieces and low-cost collectibles.

Amanda Marcuson, founder of the vintage bag charm company Bag Crap, confirms this shift. She notes that customers often seek unique ways to express personality through their accessories. “Adding silly charms to your bag is a great way for you to showcase your interests without having to tell someone,” Marcuson shares. This statement echoes the sentiments of many young women today, who are cultivating identities albeit through playful, whimsical items like Labubu dolls.

Interestingly, the dolls' unique, somewhat unsettling design might actually contribute to their appeal. Professor Joshua Dale from Chuo University in Tokyo suggests that as societal norms around cuteness evolve, people are increasingly drawn to characters that break the mould, embodying a quirky aesthetic that simultaneously intrigues and charms. “Labubus offer an alternative form of cuteness that’s refreshing to many,” he notes. This reflects a broader cultural shift where adults are seeking joy and self-expression through unconventional means amid the pressures of modern life.

The evolving perception of dolls like Labubu illustrates a transformative trend, one in which playful expression meets luxury consumerism. Keller, who finds herself frequently engaging in conversations sparked by her Labubu doll, points out, “It’s such a great connection point.” Whether it’s a conversation starter or a signifier of cultural awareness, these dolls represent more than just inanimate collectibles; they are symbolic of a quest for community in a frenetic world. As Keller prepares to share her collection at her new workplace, the narrative surrounding these curious little figures serves not only to highlight their market value but also their deeper significance in fostering connections.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/labubu-dolls-uk-pop-mart-collectors-b2756716.html), [[2]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/labubu-dolls-uk-pop-mart-collectors-b2756716.html), [[2]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls), [[6]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls), [[5]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/labubu-dolls-uk-pop-mart-collectors-b2756716.html), [[4]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/labubu-dolls-uk-pop-mart-collectors-b2756716.html), [[2]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)
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* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)
* Paragraph 8 – [[5]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls), [[6]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/labubu-dolls-uk-pop-mart-collectors-b2756716.html), [[6]](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/labubu-dolls-uk-pop-mart-collectors-b2756716.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/what-are-labubu-dolls> - Labubu dolls, introduced in 2015 by Hong Kong artist Kasing Lung, have surged in popularity, especially after Blackpink's Lisa featured one on Instagram in mid-2024. These vinyl figures, part of 'The Monsters' series, are now highly sought after, with some reselling for over £1,000. Their appeal is amplified by celebrity endorsements and a growing 'kidult' market, blending art and collectible culture. The dolls' unique design and limited availability contribute to their status as coveted items among collectors and fashion enthusiasts alike.
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