



Above: Valerie Koh, a mother of four, calls her Crybaby plushies "mood boosters".
Right: Both men and women of a certain age are seeking solace in Labubu.
Below: An early collector of Labubus, 44-year-old Pyron Tan has been able to sell some discontinued figurines at four or five times the retail price.
PHOTOS: AFP, VALERIE KOH, PYRON TAN



DESIGN

Therapy in a box? 'Kidults' turn to Labubu and Pop Mart for comfort

For midlifers facing life's biggest pressures, S\$15.90 is much cheaper than seeing a shrink. BY HELMI YUSOF

IF YOU thought Pop Mart's viral toy empire was powered only by Gen Zs and TikTok-ers, think again. In Singapore, it's the 40-somethings – middle-aged professionals juggling careers, kids and caregiving – who are also driving the collectibles boom.

Based on a recent poll by online marketplace Carousell, 42 per cent of users in its Hobbies and Toys category are aged 41 and above. Even more striking: 40 per cent of these older collectors report spending more than S\$1,000 annually on collectibles, just behind the 26-30 age group at 56 per cent.

Their favorite collectibles? Labubu, followed by Mofusand, Prismatic Evolutions, Crybaby, Pokemon, Lego and Jellycat. For these midlifers, collecting is more than a hobby – it's a much-needed coping mechanism.

Just ask Valerie Koh, deputy director of Arts House Limited and mother of four, who owns more than a hundred Pop Mart toys. "After a stressful day, you buy one and you feel better. It's that simple," she says.

She admits to buying at least one blind box a week, sometimes more, since her kids also enjoy the toys. Her current obsession? Crybaby, which she hangs on her designer bags. "They're just cute little things that make me happy. They're little mood boosters for adults with disposable cash."

Pop Mart certainly knows this: Its latest Labubu plushies series has characters called Happiness, Serenity and Hope,

while its latest Space Molly series is inspired by emojis.

Emotional benefits galore

Dr Hannah H Chang, associate professor of marketing at Singapore Management University, is not surprised by Carousell's findings. "People in their 40s are among the most stressed," she explains. "They often have young kids and ageing parents.

They're at the age where they have a lot of responsibilities at work – but at the same time, they also have a stable salary with which they can easily afford a toy that typically costs between S\$15.90 and S\$24.90."

These toys offer emotional benefits for the buyers – relief from daily burdens, as well as reminders of simpler times when they were kids and had less to worry about. "So they buy these toys to find some sense

of control and joy in a small object – and that can be a surprisingly powerful emotion," says Dr Chang.

The phenomenon of "kidults" has certainly been gaining ground. "The pandemic was tough on everyone, but now there's the tariff wars that may likely impact economies and jobs. People in their 40s are among the most worried about the future right now – so it's no surprise they're turning to toys for escapism," she adds.

Pop Mart's financials reflect this trend. In 2024, the Chinese company's net income rose 188 per cent to 3.1 billion yuan (S\$555 million), with full-year sales more than doubling to 13 billion yuan.

Sales of The Monsters dolls, including Labubu, rose to three billion yuan in 2024 compared with 368 million yuan before. Crybaby, another fast-growing intellectual property product, had a more than 1,500 per cent increase in related revenue.

Marketing genius

Pyron Tan, another married 40-something, has been collecting Labubu long before the

With names such as Happiness and Serenity, Labubu's latest plushies series is all about making people feel good.

PHOTO: POP MART



craze. He had early models, including the Labubu X SML figurines, which he sold for five times their original price.

"I think I bought them for around S\$40 and sold for about S\$200 – though I recently saw a similar piece on Carousell with an asking price of S\$1,699," he says.

But the creative professional insists he isn't in it for the money. "I buy what I like. But if the price goes up, I might choose to let it go."

He then uses the profits to pay for his next toy. "For me, buying toys helps me destress. It is self-care – part retail therapy, and part making up for the fact that I didn't have a lot of toys when I was growing up."

Like Tan, 76 per cent of Carousell respondents aged 41 and above in the survey have been collecting for more than five years – well before the global Labubu craze took off in 2024, sparked by a spontaneous endorsement from Thai pop star Lisa. Interestingly, 14 per cent of these midlifers started collecting only within the past year, suggesting that the Lisa effect has spread to a minority of 40-somethings who previously didn't even collect toys.

Dr Chang believes none of this is accidental.

"Pop Mart is very smart about identifying and responding to emerging demographics," she says. "They've ramped up production of their small plushies that double as fashion accessories – popular not just with teenagers but with adult women. They're cute, collectible and wearable, so you can feel you're part of a community when you carry it around."

At the same time, the brand caters to serious collectors with premium figurines that sometimes increase in value, while also reimagining the online shopping experience.

Its digital feature, Pop Now, lets users shake their phones to partially reveal what's inside a blind box – bringing the tactile thrill of in-store shopping into the digital realm. "I've never seen anyone replicate that experience so successfully," says Dr Chang.

Add free delivery for orders above just S\$47.70 – eliminating the common gripe of shipping costs – and it's no surprise that sales have soared.

"They hold my feelings"

Jasline Ng, another working mother in her 40s, doesn't just buy blind boxes – she sometimes purchases entire collections at one go. With more disposable income than younger collectors, she sources for rare models on Carousell and TikTok, gifts blind boxes to her friends and relatives, and dresses up her Labubus in pretty outfits.

"These toys make me feel young," she says.

"They connect me with different age groups and conversations. Whenever I see someone else carrying a Labubu or Crybaby, I feel connected to them – like we're part of the same community."

Some have called her childish. But she doesn't care. "My daughter loves the Crybaby cherry magnets. She says it represents the two of us sticking together... Overall, these toys give me emotional support. It's like Crybaby is holding my emotions for me. If I feel sad, it reminds me it's okay to cry."

For Ng, Koh and Tan, Pop Mart toys aren't just playthings – they're therapy sessions in a box.

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