



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF LAW, GOVERNMENT
AND COMMUNICATION
(IJLGC)

www.gaexcellence.com/ijlgc




THE CELEBRATION OF LABUBU: OBSESSION, GLORIFICATION AND DOMESTICATION IN INDIRECT MEDIA FRAMING

Seach Jin Beng^{1*}, Marzita Mohamed Noor²

¹Department of English Studies, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Malaysia

 seachjb@taru.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9977-7123>

²Department of English Studies, Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Malaysia

 marzita@taru.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5382-1218>

*Corresponding Author

Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 22.04.2026

Revised date: 11.05.2026

Accepted date: 04.06.2026

Published date: 23.06.2026

To cite this document:

Seach. J. B., & Noor, M. M. (2026). The Celebration of Labubu: Obsession, Glorification and Domestication in Indirect Media Framing. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 11(44), 209-222.

Abstract:

Toys are often adored because of their cuteness and aesthetic value. However, this expectation shifted when Labubu entered the toy market. With its unconventional aesthetics and sometimes repulsive, alien-like appearance, Labubu took the world by storm, becoming one of the most sought-after items in the toy industry. From laypeople to celebrities, Labubu made its way into bags as plush toys and into social media feeds as attention-grabbing content. Labubu's popularity is often attributed to star power and effective marketing strategies. However, this paper argues that beyond these factors, the media also played a pivotal role in fuelling its sustained popularity. By examining the framework of media framing, particularly indirect media framing, this paper highlights the unexpected consequences of media practices, where Labubu's popularity emerged as an indirect result of media framing in Malaysia. This paper presents a retrospective cultural analysis of the rise and discursive consolidation of Labubu in Malaysian media between 2024 and 2025, a period identified as the zenith of its cultural visibility. By analysing 30 Labubu-related headlines from various English news portals in Malaysia across three categories, Obsession, Glorification, and Domestication. This paper shows how indirect media framing contributes to Labubu's rising popularity. The findings suggest that media framing has the power to generate publicity even when the exposure is not necessarily positive. When such framing occurs frequently and repeatedly, it can sustain the popularity of subjects being framed, even when this is not the intended purpose. Hence, in the case of Labubu, indirect media framing is shown to be just as impactful as direct media framing, despite being less frequently examined.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.1144013 **Keyword:**

Indirect Media Framing, Labubu, Malaysian News Portals,
Media Framing, Toy Craze



© The authors (2026). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For commercial re-use, please contact ijlgc@gaexcellence.com.

Introduction

The great Mahatma Gandhi once said, “*There is enough on this earth for everyone’s need, but not for everyone’s greed.*” While this quote is undoubtedly a powerful reminder for us to count our blessings and remain content with what we have in life, the capitalist world may interpret it quite differently. Within the logic of capitalism, greed is not necessarily a flaw but a driving force that sustains economic activity. Greed, when examined through the lens of capitalism, becomes the very force that keeps the world running. Because greed constantly places “enough” just out of reach, the world is compelled to keep producing all types of goods, ranging from basic household items to creature comforts, in order to satiate the ever-growing appetite of consumers for material possessions. Over the years, many industries have grown exponentially, from automobiles to fashion houses. However, one industry stands out as the ultimate winner among them, the toy industry. Cannons (2020) remarked that the existence of toys can be traced back to ancient Rome, China, and India, where skipping ropes, kites, and board games were common. It was not until the 1900s that toys began to be mass-produced using materials such as wood and metal, before eventually being manufactured in large quantities using plastic to meet the growing demand in modern society.

Humans’ desire for toys may start at a tender age but as the society continues to expand and progress, toys are no longer coveted items exclusively made for children, the market is flooded with toys made exclusively for the adult demographics ranging from stuff figurines to sport cars miniatures. As a matter of fact, the number of adults who are willing to splurge on expensive toys is growing day by day, making the toy industry one of the fastest growing in the world. Today, there is even a cultural term specifically coined to describe these adults who choose to retain a childlike faculty in them in order to indulge in the imaginary world of toys. Booz (2018) noted that *kidulting* refers to letting go off the burden and responsibilities of being an adult in a playful way where one begins to re-embrace the long-abandoned joy of being fresh, inquisitive and adventurous. Meanwhile, *kidulting* is not a phase considered just merely a hobby but a lifestyle that effectively helps one to get rid of the worries and stress related to being an adult. For instance, the idea of adults donning Hello Kitty outfits and collecting expensive and rare Pokemon cards are all the rage today, often done in the name of nostalgia (Otta et al., 2025). That being the case, the toy industry has just found another reason to expand their already massive market, and this has led to the phenomenon known as toy craze. As asserted by Walsh (2005), toy craze is not a new phenomenon, in fact, by 1907, teddy bears took the world by storm even in the then immature toy industry. Even as early as 1907, adults photographing their children with their favourite teddy bears was a trend that swept across the

world. Although the teddy bear craze was attributed to a Western origin, it is crucial to note that nevertheless, toy craze is not always perceived a western-centric phenomenon. In Asia, for instance, heralded by Japan, the toy industry exploded with the emergence of Tamagotchi in 1997, a digital game that came as the size of an egg where a pet chick is waiting to be fed (Schütte & Ciarlante, 2016). Today, the toy industry is one of the most profitable in the world, estimated to be worth 95 billion USD and there is not surprising why it is one industry where manufacturers in many parts of the world are keen to invest heavily in. However, the ebbs and flows of toy craze is usually a passing phase and usually last only in a matter of months. This means that shortages today may easily turn into surplus as evidenced by the toy POP-it which was famous between 2020-2021 (Burns, 2024).

Toy craze may come and go within a short period of time, but one toy served as a living example that toys' popularity was not always short-lived. When all the right conditions aligned, a toy can turn into a cultural phenomenon that redefine an era. Over the years, toys like Barbie, Ninja Turtles, and Squishmallows have each sparked brief periods of intense obsession among children whose childhoods coincided with their peak popularity. However, none of them can come even close to whirlwind that collectible plush toy, Labubu was able to generate since the world began to fall head over heels for it. Labubu is not precisely the conventional doll that attracts admirers by dint of their cuteness and adorable features but their unconventional features that revolve around their jagged teeth, expressive eyes and odd demeanour catapulted them into international stardom. The truth is, as Jones (2026) noted, calling Labubu merely a toy would be an understatement for it is a shining example of how when culture, social and fashion collide, a never-before-seen social phenomenon emerges. Furthermore, what makes Labubu highly relevant and coveted at the same time is that Labubu comes with variant price tags starting from entry level with prices ranging from as low as 20 USD to collaborative items with luxury brands that can fetch up to hundreds of dollars. It is also noteworthy that the demographic that is most willing to purchase Labubu are young adults above the age of 18. By virtue of their strong buying power, it had then led to the burgeoning of Labubu as a cultural phenomenon (中央通訊社, 2025). The same idea was proposed by Dkk (2024) who maintained that Labubu is more than a toy as it has its unique characteristics, social traits, economic values and most importantly, personalities. Sold as items through the concept of blind box, the exponential growth of Labubu as part of Pop Mart Blind Box line is often attributed to the starpower of K POP star Lisa from Blackpink who expressed her admiration for the dolls during a few of her interviews and social media posts LiveABC編輯群 (2025). The blind box concept was originated from Japan, but the idea was well capitalized on the Chinese market when it was adapted by POP MART to sell their toys that are often marketised as exquisite and as having high uncertainty. In fact, in 2025 alone, the blind box concept generated almost 25 billion yuan in sales for the said toy company (Bettiga et al., 2025). Labubu's popularity was not short-lived, the fact that its popularity lasted for several years renders it a cultural object worthy of scholarly examination. The general assumption is that Labubu was able to achieve mainstream success by exploding in popularity was mainly because of Pop Mart's well-executed marketing tactics and highly effective branding techniques. The truth is, it often takes more than just impactful promotional strategies to render a toy a cultural object that defined an era. This study argues that apart from Pop Mart's successful marketing approaches that banks on star power and collaborations with upscale brands, the media also played a pivotal role in turning Labubu into a mass cultural sensation.

Meanwhile, as the old adage goes “You may not always be thinking about the media but the media always thinks about you”. This aptly explains how the media is more powerful and pervasive as it seems. With the proliferation of media outlets over the years, information disseminated through media is becoming more and more saturated and this leads to a more polarised society. However, presenting different perspectives and angles in a story has always been practiced by many media companies- a practice known academically as media framing. Media framing refers to the way information is presented and structured by the media to shape how audiences interpret an issue or event. It involves selecting certain aspects of reality while downplaying others, thereby influencing public perception and understanding. Nevertheless, as proposed by Littlejohn and Foss (2009), being equipped with the right knowledge of what media framing is all about and how it works is inherently crucial as it gives the public the awareness of journalistic biases. Furthermore, media framing is especially crucial for media companies when planning media campaigns related to advertising too. They further observed that media framing inherently deals with two elements namely the framing devices and reasoning devices. The former deals with the presentation and organisation of news while the latter involves providing latent and implicit information presented for the purpose of helping readers/audiences interpret messages more effectively.

Despite the fact that the primary aim of media framing is to sell the audience a story through a specific lens, the impacts of media framing do not always go as planned since the public has the ability to filter and interpret information at their own discretion. As theorised by Perslow and Ai (2025), with the ongoing of media framing practised aggressively by different media outlets around the world, it is oftentimes possible that media framing can lead to unintended consequences. As a result of having too many experts and analysts offering different perspectives to a particular issue, it may sometimes lead to even more confusion rather than allowing us to see an issue more clearly which is supposed to be the desired outcome of media framing in the first place. Consistent with this, the purview of unintended media effects is also well documented in many social scenarios. For instance, there are times when the creator of a particular media content may only intend to have it merely for entertainment purposes. However, the audience who consume the content may take it the wrong way and regard it as a form of force to cause public chaos or fuel antisocial behaviours. This scenario resonates well with the vibes of consumer effect as explained by Potter (2013). Unintentional media effects can be both immediate or perpetuating. When left unaddressed, it may lead to other social tensions such as the Mean World Syndrome where research has revealed that people who consume content on television pertaining to wars and social unrest actually think that the world is more dangerous than it seems.

As evidenced by the above-mentioned scenarios. The media is oftentimes powerful enough to influence the ways the public think and behave through media framing but due to its various unavoidable shortcomings and weaknesses, the media is also vulnerable to the public's interpretive abilities where the authorial intent can be reinterpreted and reevaluated. When this happens, the unintended media consequences and effects often come into play, and this usually leads to a spectrum of unexpected outcomes that can be both positive or negative. Hence, how media framing in Malaysia English newspaper has led indirectly to Labubu's sustained popularity is certainly worth examining because it shows the diverse effects of media framing that is scarcely examined particularly with regard to a doll that takes the world by storm. Thirty headlines related to Labubu are extracted from Malaysian English newspapers from the years 2023-2025 to analyse through the lens of media framing. When closely examined, these headlines actually resonate with three recurring themes- blind obsession, glorification and

domestication. This paper argues that while the media has not intentionally wanted to promote Labubu through their reporting, the constant framing applied to reporting Labubu has indirectly contributed to its enduring fame and admiration particularly in Malaysia. While it is widely acknowledged that Malaysians are captivated by Labubu, such fascination is usually attributed to effective marketing strategies and enduring global trends. Hence, scholarly research that focuses on how media framing in Malaysian English Newspapers contributed to Labubu's continued acclaim and recognition especially among Malaysia will offer critical insights into the role of media in shaping consumer culture and public perception, as well as shedding new light on Labubu being regarded as a meaningful cultural object embedded within local consumption practices.

Literature Review

There has been a rising number of scholarly studies directly related to Labubu. Li (2026) observed that Labubu's phenomenal success in the blind box industry did not necessarily correspond with positive public opinion. In fact, Li pointed out that the public generally viewed Labubu quite negatively, but the fact that the company was able to turn controversial opinions about the toy into brand curiosity and loyalty contributed to the striking success of the toy. Specifically, in relation to how Labubu was received in Kuala Lumpur, Su and Tao (2025) stressed that Labubu's success, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, was not merely a form of blind consumption but rather a form of cultural production because buyers were able to resonate with the toy emotionally. Also, in examining the unprecedented success of Labubu as a cultural consumer object, Yang and Li (2025) established that Labubu's success was made possible by a collective force ranging from celebrity/KOL influences, the bandwagon effect, and its non-conforming aesthetic designs. Most importantly, Labubu was a perfect reflection of the buyers' emotional fulfilment and sense of community identification. Finally, from an economic standpoint, Chen (2025) assessed that Labubu's sustainability might be threatened by various external forces, ranging from irrational consumption and secondary market speculation behaviours to the negative impacts of counterfeit products. His study proposed a few strategies to counter these external forces.

In relation to how the media has the ability to frame the toy industry, Hogan (2007) noted that the media's intention to report the industry negatively tends to sway public opinion about how irresponsible the industry can be, but he emphasised that there is a need to ensure the media also gives the industry the credit it deserves by reporting positive aspects associated with it. Meanwhile, in the same domain of media and toys, De Almeida (2017) reported that, through the media, toy manufacturers are no longer confined to being traditional with their narratives and are now diversifying their narratives, especially by breaking gender boundaries. Also, as highlighted by Hassan et al. (2021), the media can serve as a catalyst for fuelling gender stereotypes within the toy industry. Their research indicates that toys for girls are given more media exposure and that toys are usually assigned more feminine than masculine traits in general, foregrounding the idea that toys are more suited for girls. Correspondingly, as McDonald (2019) remarked, media framing can sometimes bring about unintentional consequences. Citing the #MeToo campaign as an example, which started out as a campaign to allow sexually assaulted victims to voice out their plight as a collective voice, the campaign expanded significantly, ultimately bringing about impacts on the domains of politics, identity, policy, and gender relations. This proves that media framing may not always generate the desired results. In relation to the unintentional consequences brought about by media framing, Jinbeng (2024) pointed out that Malaysia's English news portals, in framing the T20 group, led

to a paradoxical image of the high-income group. While Malaysia aims to become a high-income country, framing the T20 group as outsiders who may not require government aid and subsidies may indirectly villainise the group.

The literature reveals that the toy industry has been studied quite extensively through the lens of the media. In recent years, even Labubu has been investigated under the scholarly lens within the domains of business, media, and culture. Despite this extensive investigation, Labubu's success is often attributed to personal connection and successful business strategies, although these are often mediated through the media. Hence, this study, which closely examines how media framing has played a role in contributing to the perpetuation of Labubu as both a consumer and cultural object, fills the gap left by previous scholars, proving that the media is not merely a vehicle for influencers and manufacturers to assert their impact. Rather, the media itself is powerful enough, through media framing, to give Labubu the leverage to become a phenomenal success through the unintentional consequences of media framing.

Methodology

This paper examines how selected English newspapers in Malaysia frame Labubu through three recurring lenses, namely obsession, glorification, and domestication. A total of thirty headlines were selected, with ten representing each category. These headlines were sourced from various Malaysian English online news portals, including mainstream newspapers such as *The Star*, *New Straits Times*, and *Malay Mail*, as well as independent platforms like *The Rakyat Post* and *Says.com*, covering the period between 2024 and 2025. The inclusion of both mainstream and independent news portals ensures a broader representation of how English-language media frames Labubu for Malaysian readers. The selected timeframe captures the rise and declines of Labubu, allowing for an examination of its sustained visibility within the toy industry. While most headlines report local developments, a smaller number of cover international events; however, both are included as they contribute to shaping local readers' perceptions. The analysis adopts a qualitative linguistic approach, examining how each headline constructs meaning through specific framing strategies. Obsession is analysed through the lens of the suspension of rationality, focusing on how extreme behaviours and seemingly irrational actions are presented and normalised. Glorification is examined through exaggeration and hyperbolic framing, where the toy is elevated beyond its ordinary function and associated with heightened desirability. Domestication is analysed through the concept of the ritualisation of everyday life, highlighting how Labubu is integrated into routine social practices such as gifting, celebrations, and personal styling.

Through these three lenses, the study explores how repeated patterns in headline construction contribute to the sustained visibility of Labubu. In doing so, it considers how media framing may generate indirect amplification effects, extending the toy's cultural presence beyond its initial marketing and commercial positioning.

Discussion and Analysis

When Affection Turns into Obsession

Headlines

CCTV captures boys tilting claw machine to steal Labubu dolls	19 Nov 2024 New Straits Times
Melbourne's 'Labubu Bandit' caught: Police bust toy heist involving dozens of rare viral dolls worth RM25,000	22 Oct 2025 Malay Mail
UK's Pop Mart halts in-store Labubu sales amid violence, staff threats and global resale frenzy	24 May 2025 Malay Mail
Malaysian woman loses almost RM20,000 in Instagram scam trying to purchase popular Labubu dolls	1 Nov 2024 Malay Mail
RM16,000 fine for woman caught smuggling Labubu dolls, luxury bags into Singapore from London	20 Nov 2024 Malay Mail
Malaysian Man Says Girlfriend Complains About Being Broke Despite Labubu Obsession Taking Over Their Home	14 May 2025 The Rakyat Post
Labubu collector describes 'battlefield' as toys pulled from shops in Britain	25 May 2025 The Star
RM16,000 fine for woman caught smuggling Labubu dolls, luxury bags into Singapore from London	20 Nov 2024 Malay Mail
Malaysian Man Says Girlfriend Complains About Being Broke Despite Labubu Obsession Taking Over Their Home	9 June 2025 The Rakyat Post
Young Man Owes 14 Ah Longs After Failed Labubu Toy Business Venture	14 May 2025 The Rakyat Post

Obsession is often associated with a mind preoccupied by persistent and unhealthy thoughts. While it is not unusual for individuals to develop a heightened affection for things they find fascinating, such attachments become problematic when they exceed social norms and decorum. Historical and contemporary examples demonstrate how consumer obsession can lead individuals to justify irrational behaviours, ranging from excessive spending to distorted priorities. From Michael Jackson's Pepsi commercial to product launches by Apple, obsession has long been embedded within consumer culture, reshaping perceptions of what constitutes normal behaviour. As definitions of normality continue to evolve, a particular toy has recently captured global attention with its furry bodies and jagged teeth. What might have once appeared unsettling is now embraced as an unconventional aesthetic. More significantly, attachment to these plush toys—known as Labubu—has intensified over time. The Labubu universe is not merely a commercial success; it redefines the cultural and economic meaning of toys. Such success would not have been possible without intense public engagement.

This engagement is frequently highlighted in Malaysian English news portals, where reports reveal behaviours that signal excessive attachment. One clear indicator is the willingness to disregard legal and ethical boundaries. The collection of headlines examined in this study suggests that such behaviours are escalating. Individuals have reportedly engaged in theft, smuggling, and irrational purchasing practices in pursuit of Labubu. A closer examination reveals that these actions often involve significant financial loss. While overconsumption is not new in a capitalist society, the willingness to ignore severe financial consequences warrants attention. The monetary figures cited—ranging from RM16,000 to RM25,000—are not merely statistics; they illustrate how rational financial judgment can be compromised. Cases involving theft, scams, smuggling, and debt accumulation demonstrate how individuals place themselves in precarious financial situations. These patterns suggest that such behaviours are not isolated incidents but part of a broader phenomenon of intensified consumer attachment. This also aligns well with a more contemporary definition of obsession where it often involves persistent and repetitious thoughts which are associated with anxiety rather than pleasure. (“Handbook on Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders,” 2015) Further examples, such as manipulating claw machines or justifying hoarding despite financial hardship, reinforce the argument that these behaviours exceed normative consumption. In extreme cases, retail environments are described as competitive spaces where individuals struggle to secure these items. As noted by Kozak et al. (2001), obsessions are oftentimes triggered by compulsive and behavioral factors. While such descriptions may appear hyperbolic, they nonetheless reflect a disruption of conventional consumer behaviour.

Despite the negative portrayal of these behaviours, it would be inaccurate to assume that such media coverage diminishes Labubu’s appeal. On the contrary, these narratives appear to amplify its visibility. Rather than damaging its reputation, the coverage has coincided with a surge in demand and public attention, both globally and within Malaysia. Notably, trending discussions on social media have increasingly centred on Labubu rather than more traditionally newsworthy topics. This shift suggests that Labubu has moved beyond being a mere product to becoming a cultural phenomenon. Although media framing presents these behaviours as irrational or excessive, it simultaneously contributes to heightened visibility and desirability. This paradox demonstrates that media framing can produce unintended consequences. In the case of Labubu, portraying consumer behaviour as obsessive does not deter engagement; instead, it appears to intensify it. Such dynamics highlight the need to examine this phenomenon not only from an economic perspective but also through a cultural lens.

Living on the Edge of Glorification

Headlines

<u>From Labubu to Skullpanda: Why Malaysians are going gaga for blind boxes</u>	The Star 5 Dec 2025
Mini Labubu dolls sell out almost immediately as fans flock to stores	The Star 30 Aug 2025
Labubu doll craze drives enthusiasts to spend thousands	The Star 21 Oct 2025
Labubu mania: Japanese snack-themed launch draws queue at Ion Orchard from 5.30am	New Straits Times 3 July 2025

Labubu craze sweeps Afghanistan as toy trend fuels retail and cultural shifts	Malay Mail 24 Nov 2025
Labubu doll fetches US\$150,000 at auction	The Star 25 May 2025
Pop Mart profit more than doubles on Labubu-doll craze driven by celebrities	The Malaysian Reserve 26 March 2025
Woman Sells Her Soul To Buy Labubu Dolls & Concert Tickets. Yes, Really	Says.com 2 Oct 2025
Pop Mart's Largest Store Opens In TRX With Labubu, Crybaby, Hirono & More	Says.com 29 April 2025
Why do Malaysians love blind boxes? We unbox the psychology behind the trend	The Star 5 Dec 2025

Two of the world's most reputable dictionaries, Oxford English Dictionary and Cambridge Dictionary, define glorification as "the act of making something seem better or more important than it really is" and "the act of describing something in a way that makes it seem better or more important than it really is." Taken in this literal sense, public affection for Labubu has undoubtedly reached the level of glorification. While panic buying may be justifiable during a pandemic, its occurrence in a non-pandemic context warrants closer scrutiny. As evidenced by headlines from Malaysian English news portals, it is not an overstatement to claim that Labubu is being glorified. The fact that fans are willing to 'flock to stores', 'spend thousands', and queue 'from 5.30am' for non-essential toys suggests behaviour that borders on the irrational. However, once Labubu is elevated onto a pedestal as an object of glorification, such behaviours begin to appear internally coherent. This sense of excess is further magnified when Labubu is reported to 'fuel retail and cultural shifts' in Afghanistan—a country often associated with a strict Islamic regime and economic hardship.

Beyond this, Labubu is further framed as an object of glorification when individuals are depicted as making significant financial sacrifices to obtain it. The claim that a toy can 'fetch US\$150,000 at auction', alongside reports that its manufacturer, Pop Mart, saw profits more than double, reinforces the notion that Labubu is no longer perceived as a mere collectible but rather as something approaching a quasi-sacred object. In the Malaysian context, the opening of the largest Pop Mart store in TRX—one of the country's newest and most prominent shopping destinations—further signals an exceptionally high level of demand. The act of glorification reaches a point of near absurdity in headlines such as 'Woman Sells Her Soul To Buy Labubu Dolls', where the individual 'wasn't bothered about what happened to her soul'. Additionally, separate headlines describing Malaysians as 'going gaga'—an expression denoting extreme enthusiasm or near-irrational infatuation—and calling for analyses through the lens of 'psychology' further reinforce this framing. Such portrayals, although not necessarily intentional, inadvertently contribute to amplifying Labubu's popularity through media discourse.

The unexpected consequences of media framing is highlighted through this analysis where the headlines indicating the glorification of Labubu did not lead to public's apathy or disgust but instead, it reveals how media framing and collective desire can elevate an ordinary object into

a symbol of exaggerated value and meaning. What begins as fascination gradually transforms into a socially reinforced phenomenon, where glorification is normalized and even rationalized.

From Store to Door: The Domestication of the Unfamiliar

Headlines

Malaysian Boss Gifts Domestic Worker Trendy Labubu Toys After 6 Years Of Service	The Rakyat Post 3 July 2025
From blind boxes to box office? Sony developing Labubu movie	Malay Mail 15 Nov 2025
Labubu-maker Pop Mart diversifies into jewellery with new concept store Popop	The Star 15 June 2025
Fans crown Michelle Yeoh 'Labubu Queen' after she reveals she has over 100 Labubu dolls	The Star 20 Nov 2025
Michelle Yeoh celebrates 63rd birthday with limited-edition Labubu doll	The Star 7 Aug 2025
6 Local Businesses That Sell Cute Clothes So You Can Doll Up Your Labubu	Says.com 9 Dec 2025
Woman Mistakes Labubu Doll For A Chinese God & Starts Worshipping It	Says.com 15 Aug 2025
Father Handmakes Labubu For Daughter After Viral Toy Sells Out Online	Says.com 18 June 2025
Beijing Has A Pop Mart Theme Park Where You Can Meet Life-Sized Labubus, Play Games & More	Says.com 24 March 2025
Actress Michelle Yeoh Celebrates 63rd Birthday With Limited Edition Labubu Doll & Labubu Cakes	Hype. My 8 Aug 2025

Labubu also makes its way into our lives through headlines that domesticate it. What started as a plush toy that many found repulsive eventually became a household item whose presence is integrated into everyday life and made meaningful. Some headlines framed Labubu as the perfect gift. Whether it is an employer expressing her appreciation to a domestic helper for her '6 Years of Service' or a father's affection in which he 'Handmakes Labubu for Daughter', these headlines have placed Labubu as a sentimental object that goes far beyond the toy's soulless and dehumanised image.

Furthermore, the domestication of Labubu was taken to greater heights, and the headlines evince how Labubu entered our everyday life by turning it into consumable media and wearable objects. For instance, with 'Sony developing Labubu movie' and 'Labubu-maker Pop Mart

diversifies into jewellery’, Labubu is thus framed as an inescapable presence—no longer needing to be hung as plushies on our bags, but now more ubiquitous in daily life. On top of that, through media framing in Malaysia, Labubu has become an object that can be loved like one’s children or pets, as indicated in the headline ‘6 Local Businesses That Sell Cute Clothes So You Can Doll Up Your Labubu’.

However, the most effective way of domesticating Labubu through media framing has been associating it with a Malaysian superstar widely considered the pride of the nation, Michelle Yeoh. Headlines framing her as the ‘Labubu Queen’ and reporting how she ‘celebrates 63rd birthday with limited-edition Labubu doll’ and limited-edition ‘Labubu Cakes’ placed the toy closer to Malaysians. The fact that she openly confessed her love for Labubu over the years in various interviews overseas also brings Labubu much closer to the hearts of Malaysians. When a foreign toy is linked to a superstar who is already a household name, the domestication of Labubu naturally becomes inevitable.

Conclusion

Although Labubu is said to have passed its prime as a toy that once took the world by storm, the success stories associated with it cannot be easily forgotten or disregarded. This paper that analysis Labubu from a scholarly lens shows that the toy’s popularity was not the result of merely star power or effective marketing strategies alone. The media, through its framing of Labubu, did play a significant role in turning Labubu into a cultural object particularly in Malaysia. Further scholars who wish to examine this iconic toy may further examine if media framing also played a role in sustaining its popularity on a wider scale be it the Asian or global perspectives. This paper clearly highlights the power of media framing and how even as unexpected consequences, it is still able to fuel the popularity of a toy. When indirect media framing and toy craze are examined alongside each other, it shows us precisely how it takes multiple conditions to meet for a real star like Labubu to emerge. Labubu is not merely a symbol of the toy craze that swept the world between 2022 and 2025; it also serves as an important reminder of the many individuals who, directly or indirectly, contributed to its rise as a global phenomenon. While some collectors are already looking to sell or part with their Labubu collections now that the trend has passed its peak, its cultural footprint should not be forgotten. Whether viewed as a manifestation of consumer culture or an expression of irrational aesthetic taste, Labubu remains a fascinating chapter in contemporary popular culture. Its story is far from over. Who knows? If a Labubu movie eventually comes to fruition, the craze may once again find its way back into the cycle of global trends.

-
- Acknowledgements:** The authors wish to convey their heartfelt appreciation to Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology for its continuous support and for providing the facilities and resources necessary for the completion of this study. The authors also extend their gratitude to colleagues and peers whose valuable suggestions, insightful comments, and constructive feedback contributed significantly to the refinement and overall quality of this research paper.
- Funding Statement:** This research is self-funded by both the authors.
- Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Law, Government and Communication (IJLGC).
- Ethics Statement:** This study did not involve any human participants, animals, or sensitive data requiring ethical approval. The authors confirm that the research was conducted in accordance with accepted academic integrity and ethical publishing standards.
- Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Author 1 led the conceptualization, methodological design, and overall execution of the study. Author 2 conducted the data collection and analysis and contributed to the review and refinement of the manuscript.
-

References

- Bettiga, D., Noci, G., & Yacout, O. (2025). *Emotions as Key Drivers of Consumer Behaviors: A Multidisciplinary Perspective, 2nd edition*. Frontiers Media SA.
- Booz, N. (2018). *The Kidult Handbook: From Blanket Forts to Capture the Flag, a Grownup's Guide to Playing Like a Kid*. Simon and Schuster.
- Bettiga, D., Noci, G., & Yacout, O. (2025). *Emotions as Key Drivers of Consumer Behaviors: A Multidisciplinary Perspective, 2nd edition*. Frontiers Media SA.
- Burns, P. (2024). *New venture creation: A Framework for Entrepreneurial Start-ups*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Cannons, H. C. (2020). *History of toys*. Raintree.
- Chen, Z. (2025). The Labubu craze: marketing strategies, consumer risks, and pathways to sustainability. *Highlights in Business Economics and Management*, 65, 488–496. <https://doi.org/10.54097/117nkz92>
- De Almeida, D. B. L. (2017). ON DIVERSITY, REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE DISCOURSE OF TOY CAMPAIGNS. *Linguagem Em (Dis)Curso*, 17(2), 257–270. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4017-170206-6216>
- Dkk, A. N. a. a. K. (2024). *Transformasi Komunikasi Digital Menuju Indonesia Berkelanjutan: Komunikasi Digital dan Dinamika Budaya*. Elex Media Komputindo.
- Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*. (2008). Academic Press.
- Handbook on Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders*. (2015). In American Psychiatric Association Publishing eBooks. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9781615378524>
- Hogan, S. P. (2007). Toy stories, horror stories and fairy tales: the role of the media in highlighting issues of corporate responsibility. *Young Consumers Insight and Ideas for Responsible Marketers*, 8(2), 94–100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17473610710757446>
- Jinbeng, S. (2024). Framing and othering the T20 group in Malaysia: An analysis of news articles from selected mainstream and independent news portals. *SEARCH Journal of Media and Communication Research*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.58946/search-16.2.p1>
- Jones, K. (2026). *International Fashion Marketing: Strategic Management and Promotion for Global Fashion Brands*. Kogan Page Publishers.
- Kozak, M. J., Foa, E. B., & Clark, D. A. (2001). Mastery of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: A Cognitive-Behavioral Approach Therapist Guide. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 15(3), 273–276. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0889-8391.15.3.273>
- Li, J. (2026). Controversy, Culture, and Commerce: A case study of LaBubu and the disconnection between public opinion and market behavior. In *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research/Advances in social science, education and humanities research* (pp. 50–61). https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-541-6_7
- LiveABC編輯群. (2025). *CNN 互動英語 2025 年 9 月號 No.300 【有聲版】: The Awakening? 覺醒還是沉迷? 聊天機器人造成潛在心理危機*. 希伯崙股份有限公司
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2009). *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. SAGE.
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2010). *Theories of human communication: Tenth Edition*. Waveland Press.
- McDonald, A. F. (2019). Framing #MeToo: Assessing the Power and Unintended Consequences of a Social Media Movement to Address Sexual Assault. In *Handbook of Sexual Assault and Sexual Assault Prevention* (pp. 79–107). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23645-8_6
- Otta, A., Talukdar, M. C., & Prakash, J. (2025). *Psychologists Magazine November 2025: Mental Health Magazine*. Utsaah Psychological Services Pvt. Ltd.
- Perslow, G., & Ai. (2025). *Contradiction effect principles*. Publiflye AS.

- Potter, W. J. (2013). *Media literacy*. SAGE Publications.
- Schütte, H., & Ciarlante, D. (2016). *Consumer behaviour in Asia*. Springer.
- Su, L., & Tao, X. (2025). Chasing the Ghost: An Autoethnography of Scarcity, Fandom, and Value-Making in the Hunt for Labubu. *Critical Humanistic Social Theory*., 2(3).
<https://doi.org/10.62177/chst.v2i3.487>
- Walsh, T. (2005). *Timeless toys: Classic Toys and the Playmakers Who Created Them*. Andrews McMeel Publishing.
- Yang, S., & Li, B. (2025). Study on Labubu explosion phenomenon and consumption driving mechanisms. *Economics & Business Management*, 2(2), 52.
<https://doi.org/10.63313/ebm.9079>
- 中央通訊社. (2025). *全球中央7月號/2025 第199期* (Vol. 199). 中央通訊社.