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2024

Student Life Report

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Foreword



Can you believe it's been a whole year since we published our last insights report? A lot has changed since then.

One cohort has graduated – joining the millions of young people across the world who are challenging workplace norms from the junior ranks. Another has arrived, bringing with them new trends and new ideas. Uni is less of a destination, more an emotional road trip. We can't wait to see which pit stops the class of 2027 will make.

This is not the same picture we were looking at in the height of the COVID pandemic. Many students we spoke to had no sense of digitised lectures, virtual Freshers Fairs, or quarantined halls. The students on campus today are forging their own culture. You'll see how important food has become to this cohort – more so, even, than nightlife and club culture. You'll also learn the key building blocks to a university friendship – as it turns out, students, who are mostly

Gen Z, aren't as rooted in the digital world as we've come to believe.

We'll also share how students are browsing, spending, and building brand loyalties. From ad avoidance to Gen Zs' penchant for multitasking, the latest evolution of shopping habits are fascinating.

Students are certainly not a monolith – in fact, they're quite the opposite. At university, they're figuring out what makes them unique. This is a glimpse into life on campus – in all its messy, contradictory glory. I hope that you find it useful in forging connections with the next generation.

Becky Kells
Editor – native

Methodology

The survey

native surveyed a sample of our student audience in March 2024. There were 603 participants in total.

68%

of these were Gen Z students (aged 16-27), 21% were Millennials (aged 28-40) and 11% were 40+.

65%

of our participants identified as female, 32% identified as male and 3% identified as non-binary.

The student contributors

To bolster the quantitative data, we went on to interview 15 Gen Z students who completed the survey, discussing food, friendships, Freshers and more.



Keshavi, 26,
University of Strathclyde



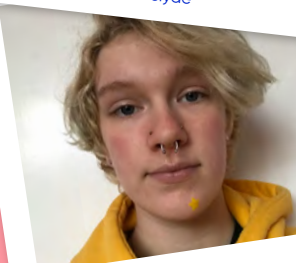
George, 19,
University of East Anglia



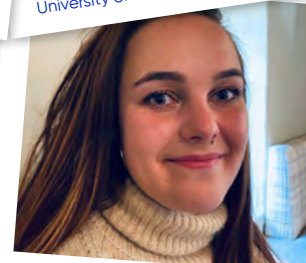
Ashikita, 20,
Sheffield Hallam University



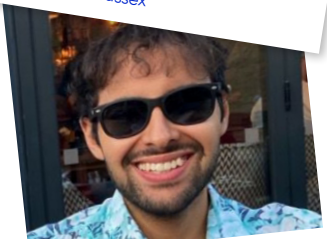
Isabella, 20,
University of Sussex



Toby, 19,
University of Hull



Mari-Jeanne, 24,
Swansea University



Leo, 23,
Bath Spa University

+ 3 more

What's changed in a year?

More students have moved out of the family home

Back in 2023, 1 in 3 students were living with parents or caregivers – often in the same bedroom they'd grown up in. Commuter students were – and are – an oft-overlooked demographic. Not fully immersed in university culture, they often miss out on late-night activities, and can take longer to bond with their peers.

This year, the number of students opting to live with parents and caregivers has dipped significantly by 48%. Covid and financial restrictions meant that many students weren't living at home by choice. The increase in students moving out of their family homes is a positive one – it implies they are shedding their fears, finding financial security and embracing independent life.

Students who do live in close proximity to university have clearly felt the social benefits. Isabella, 20 –

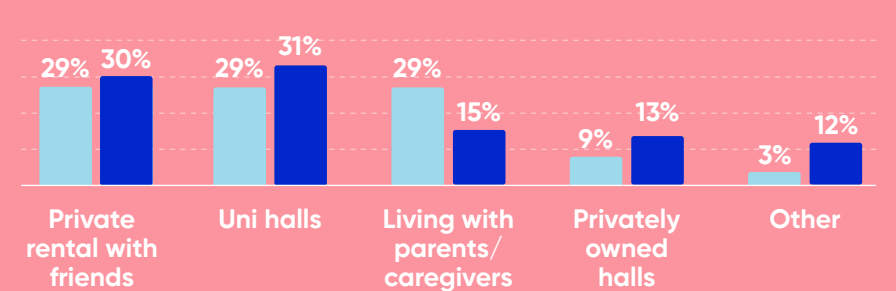
a politics student at the University of Sussex – lives in a houseshare with friends. "I sit downstairs, I crochet with my friends – we drink a bottle of wine and watch a reality TV show. It's really giving middle-aged friendship group that are about to go for bottomless brunch. We're just so chill and I love it."

Students are spending more time on campus

It's not just that students are moving closer to their campuses – they're also spending more time there during the week. The average time spent on campus per week has increased by 2.7 hours. That's the equivalent of nearly three lectures – or one evening of dinner and drinks!

Students aged 34-40 are on campus the longest – averaging 24.3 hours per week. But Gen Z students are also spending more time in their university spaces than they were 12 months ago; their average comes in at 18.4

Students' living situation



hours per week. We'll get into the activities and cultural conditions that have shaped this increase in the wider report.

Students are more motivated by ethics – and convenience

When we last asked students about what motivated them to buy from brands, it was the height of the cost-of-living crisis. A year on, this crisis has solidified into a perpetual state of high cost-of-living. Many students' priorities reflect this: affordability remains the top concern for student shoppers when selecting a brand, closely followed by quality.

But there has been a significant shift in other priorities. Convenience – a new entry for 2024 – shot straight to third place. There has also been some movement within the more ethics-driven factors, in particular, the environment (up by

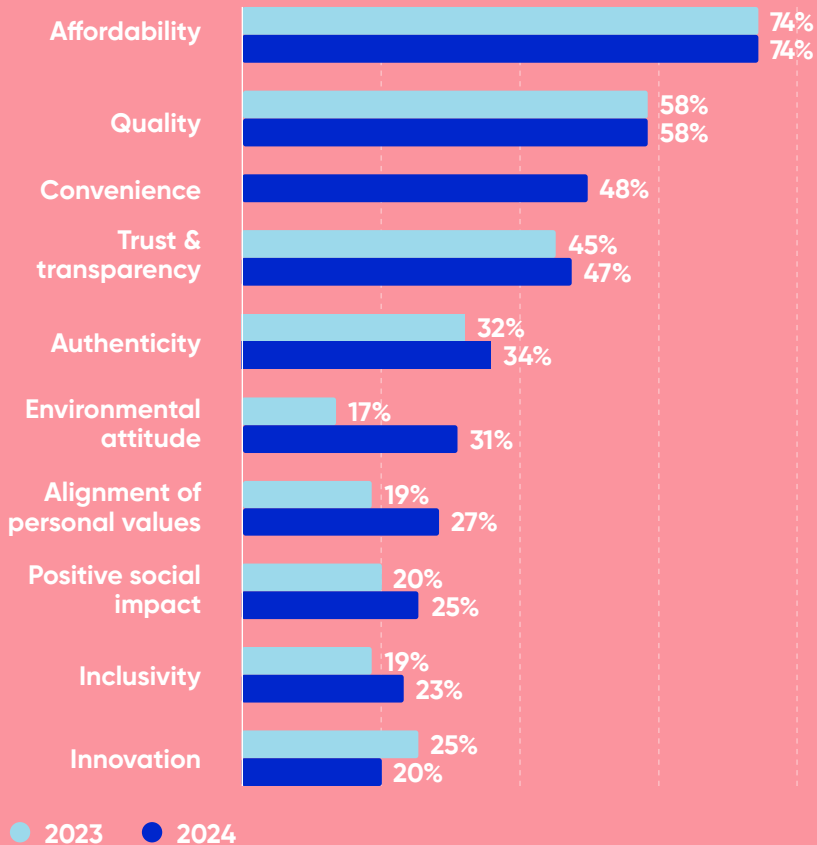
The number of students living with parents has decreased by

48%

14%), and value alignment – which has increased by a hefty 82%.

There has been more discourse online in the past year about ethics and values across a wide range of matters, from global politics to environmental decisions. This year's students could be more conscious of these factors than the 2023 sample due to osmosis. It's worth noting, though, that students still put affordability above all else.

What factors play a role in Gen Z student's brand choices?



Hours spent on campus
has risen by

16.6%

The DL for brands

- * Students are moving on out. Homewares and decor brands, it's your time to shine. Launch yourselves at top of mind with a multi-channel Freshers campaign.
- * This is also a time where students are more open to "adult" verticals like utilities and insurance. They're new to this - so will require some education alongside pure marketing.
- * Affordability is important to students - but you cannot ignore their ethics. Align with what matters most to them, and don't be afraid to take a stand - just like our brand partner, Lounge Underwear, did with their Boob Box campaign in 2023.



Via native, Lounge Underwear took to campus in 2023 to educate students about breast cancers and raise money for the Lounge Foundation. "It was a complete success" said Cam Healy, Head of Events.

Freshers: A pathway to adulthood

It's one of the biggest cultural milestones in the student calendar. But what does Freshers actually mean to students? And how do they engage with it? Let's rewind right back to those first few days on campus...



Ready to reach students at scale? [Get in touch today to kickstart your journey with us.](#)

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Freshers

Official definition

A week at the beginning of a university year, usually with a programme of events intended to welcome new first-year students.

– Collins Dictionary

Defined by students

"Freshers is kind of the whole of your first year. Without it you'd be very stuck, confused – potentially really lonely without it. Because it kind of helps you in that change out of your parents doing everything for you to doing everything yourself."

Hannah, 18,
Anglia Ruskin University

"Freshers was legendary. I met a lot of friends. It was an eye opening experience. I finally remembered how to be young again!"

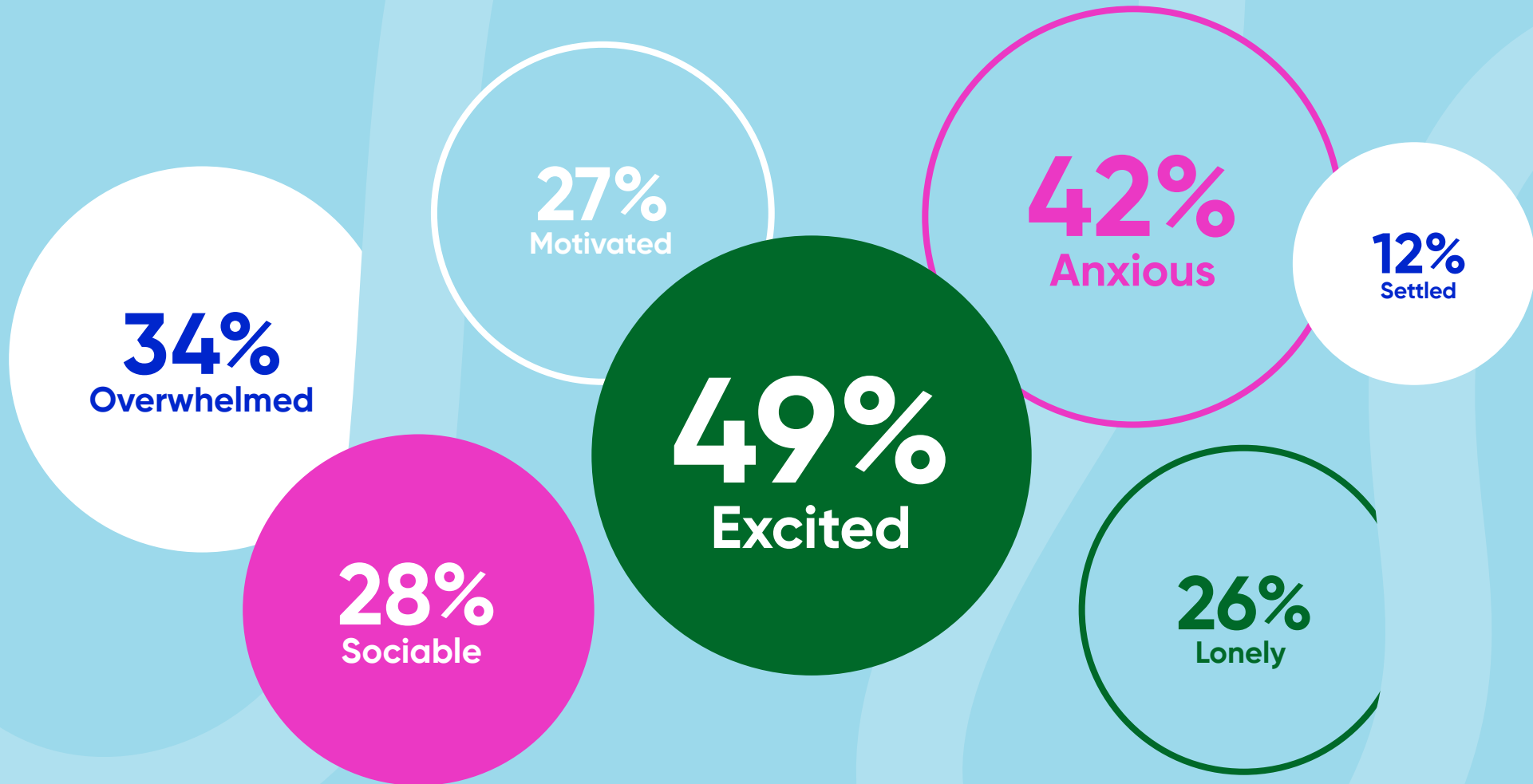
Leo, 23,
Bath Spa University

"Freshers, I think, is kind of the first experience of adulthood in a way. So much happens in that week to kind of integrate you into your University. I do also think that – as I said – sometimes we place a bit too much importance on it and that can scare people who didn't have the most successful Freshers Week."

Isabella, 20,
University of Sussex

Freshers feels

Students' emotions during the first week of uni



Freshers: time spent on campus

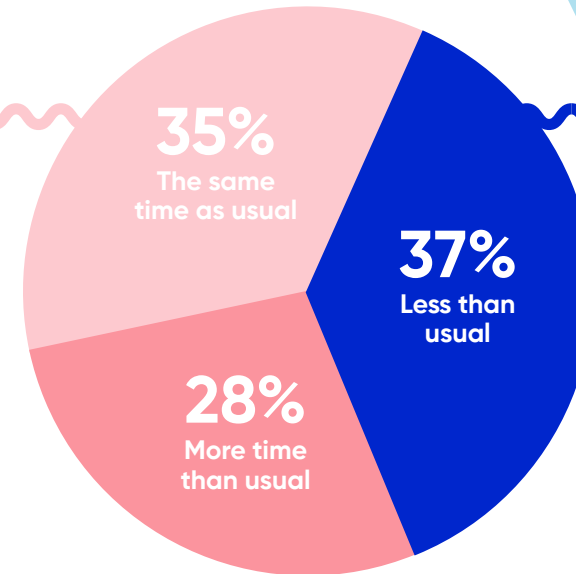
63%

of students spend more - or at least equal - time on campus during Freshers.



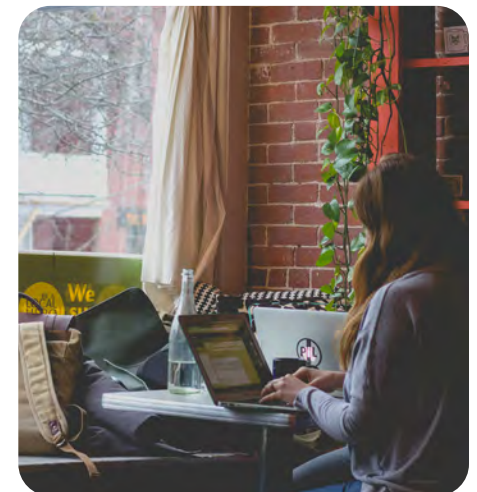
"It was nice to have that sort of starting point that everybody was in. I met a lot of new people. Most of whom are still my friends now."

Hannah, 18,
Anglia Ruskin University
experienced Freshers in 2023



"Freshers was not good for me - as it was in Covid. It was very digital. You couldn't see a lot of people - it was very restricted to just a small community of colleges. There weren't a lot of chances to meet different people, so it wasn't as great."

Sarah, 22,
University of Oxford
experienced Freshers in 2021



Freshers: key touchpoints

What did students do during their first week of uni?

42%

Attended
SU event

48%

Tried brand
freebies
or samples

55%

Visit Freshers/
Welcome Fair

43%

Followed
SU on social
media

36%

Used student
discount

55%

Visit
on-campus
spaces

45%

Visit SU
website

Gen Zs love
in-person experiences

62% vs 39%

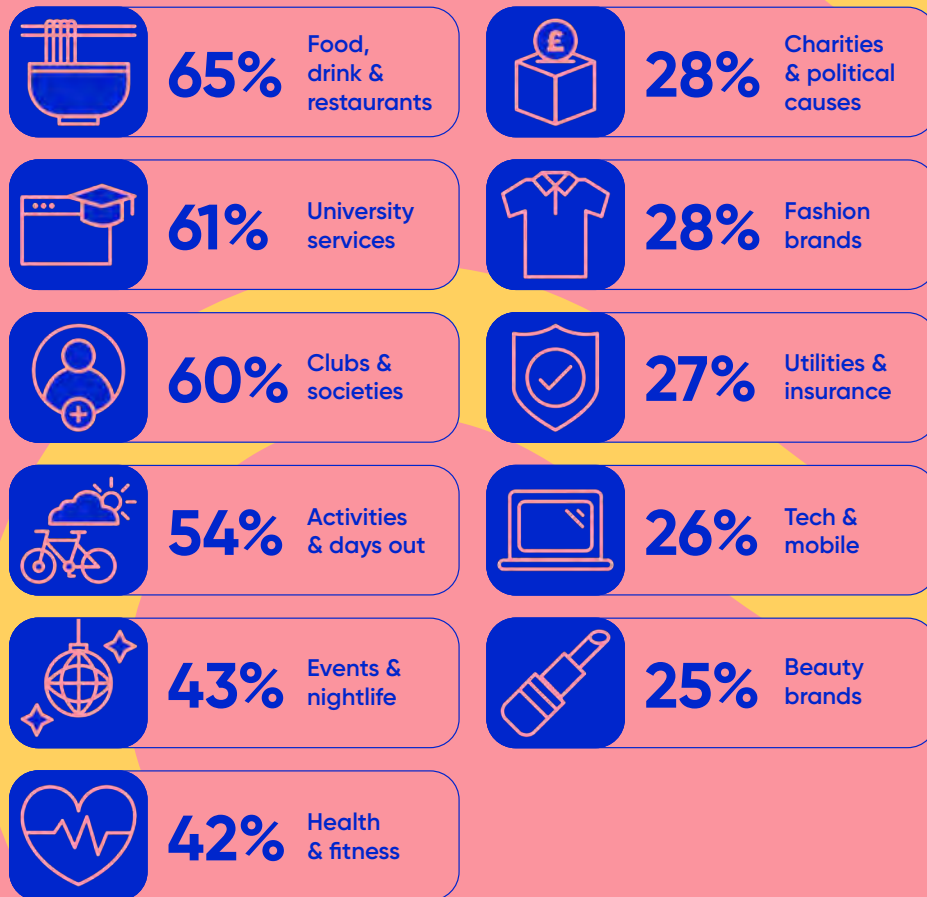
of 18-27-year-olds attend the
Freshers fair compared to 39%
of 28-33-year-olds.

60% vs 40%

Similarly, 60% of 18-27-
year-olds visit on campus
spaces compared to 44%
of 28-33-year-olds.

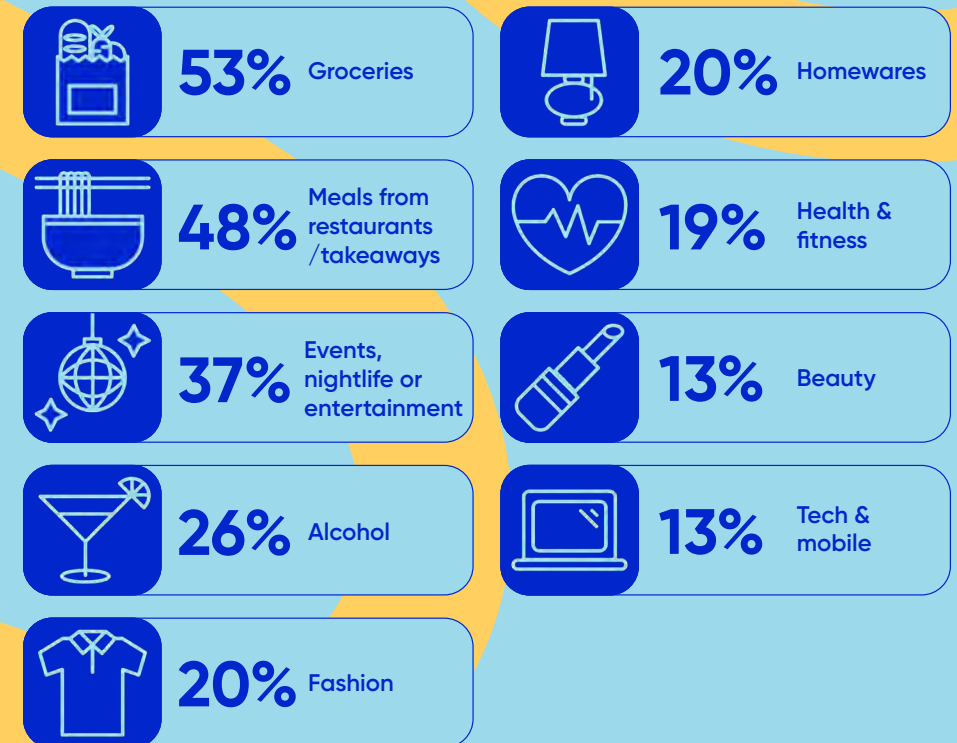
Brand discovery during Freshers

What do students want to see?



Shopping in Freshers

What do students recall buying during Freshers?





Female students are more likely to...

- * Feel anxious or overwhelmed during Freshers.
- * Attend the Freshers Fair.
- * Look for fashion, beauty and activities brands at the Freshers Fair.
- * Buy fashion and beauty during Freshers.



Male students are more likely to...

- * Feel sociable and motivated during Freshers.
- * Look for technology brands at the Freshers Fair.
- * Buy health-and-fitness-related products during Freshers.



Non-binary students are more likely to...

- * Feel lonely during Freshers.
- * Be on campus during Freshers.
- * Look for clubs and societies at Freshers Fairs.

81%

of students who see a brand at Freshers come away with purchase intent.

"I think they were promoting Subway. I did go on to buy from Subway. I was never really a person for Subway, but then getting the flyer [made me think] let me just give it a try."

Ashikita, 20,
Sheffield Hallam University.

Students' thoughts on brands

"I remember GiffGaff cell company. My current cell provider is GiffGaff because we had that information on it [at Freshers]. I did get takeaways from the local place. So yeah it sort of introduced me to a lot of brands that I obviously don't have in South Africa."

Mari-Jeanne, 24,
University of Swansea

"I remember seeing lots of clubs and societies. I also saw a lot of Domino's. I work at Papa Johns - but I have to say, the pizza nights we had last year were mostly Domino's. They were everywhere on campus during Freshers week."

Leo, 23,
Bath Spa University

"I remember seeing Trading Post, which is a Sussex-based coffee shop. We did have PRYZM there. They gave me a free lanyard. Also, the Brighton club Chalk was there. [Since Freshers], I've definitely been to PRYZM. Chalk too, because they're big student clubs. Trading Post is a big place - I go there to study."

Isabella, 20,
University of Sussex

The DL for brands

* Freshers is a time of heightened emotions and intensity. Think about where you fit into the picture, and tailor your messaging as such. Are you an events or nightlife brand that can stoke excitement? A not-for-profit looking to support and nurture students in their uni journey? Or the food brand they'll keep ordering from again and again? Align your messaging to their emotions for best results.

* 81% of students come out of Freshers with purchase intent - but you have to convert that intent into loyalty. Think about how you can evolve your on-campus presence beyond Freshers; what other moments in the student calendar align to your brand? There are 251 throughout the year to choose from, like Black Friday, Varsity and Awards Szn.

* Freshers is a great time to focus in on the day in the life of a student - and align your marketing to their movements. If you reinforce your message in relevant spaces over time, you increase the likelihood that they'll convert.



Campus media really came into its own in launching energy drink C4 on campus - mirroring students' movements across gyms, accommodation blocks and Freshers fairs to place 150,000 samples in students hands.

Fuelled by food

"I would say I get quite a lot of takeaways – usually three or four times a week", says Sarah.

She's a third-year student at the University of Oxford, and – while she balances ordering takeaway with home-cooked meals – "cereal or toast, pasta and sauce, or ready-made food I can just put in the air fryer" – takeaway meals are a big part of her sustenance.

"I get really fast food – like Popeyes, or maybe Boba sometimes", she continues. "I usually get bored with the food at home, and [will order] if I'm feeling a bit lazy and want something really fatty to eat".

Our research shows that food sits at the heart of the Gen Z student experience. It is how they socialise, how they connect with each other, how they express their creativity, and how they celebrate diverse identities.

53%

of students believe that food, drink and restaurant choices are a big part of their identity.

It is also something they're willing to spend a lot of money on. Restaurants & takeaway is the number one discretionary spending category in students' lives, outranking higher-AOV verticals like tech, mobile and fashion. When we dug a little deeper, students said that – in particular – takeaways featured heavily in their lives.



"It's giving family" – food as a social medium

We've been tracking Gen Zs' abandonment of drinking culture for a few years now – and our 2024 survey shows a slight preference among Gen Z students for food-focused activities compared to alcohol-oriented ones. Overall, 58.54% of students are paying for restaurants or takeaways at least once every two weeks. 43% are paying for nightlife each fortnight. It's worth noting that Gen Z students do still go out – and that nightlife decline across the UK is not quite as drastic as it seems (see [Public First's nightlife index](#) for more on this).

Indeed, many students who we interviewed spoke of getting takeaways after a night out – the two industries go hand-in-hand. That said, food clearly has clout as a social currency among this cohort of students. Isabella, a 20-year-old student at the University of Sussex, describes how she cooks with her housemates. "Yesterday we had a lentil and sweet potato curry; Sunday we had pasta bake; Saturday we had halloumi roast. We usually eat dinner together, unless some of us are busy. Then we'll plate it up for the other person and leave it in the microwave – like, it's giving 'family'.

Leo, a 23-year-old Bath Spa University student, has also found communal dining to be a big feature of student living. "I have done a few pizza nights with my housemates – mostly it's a social thing, but also sometimes I'm too tired or lazy to cook", he says.



Food as entertainment: the power of wings

Gen Z students' love of food also overlaps with the entertainment sector. Take Wingstop for example. The US-headquartered chicken giant first flapped its spicy wings across the Atlantic back in 2018. It didn't take long for the chain to find its way right to the heart of British youth culture. Wingstop identified the subcultures it wanted to be a part of before it even arrived: Love Island watchers, JD sports shoppers and boxing fans, according to this [Business Insider profile](#). And, via strategic collabs with the likes of Xbox, Gymshark and PrettyLittleThing, it landed. These collabs – along with Wingstop's penchant for personalisation in how your chicken is flavoured – put it firmly on the menu of students.

Food as convenience

But, for most students, delivery culture has revolutionised how they live and work. This generation of students are, notoriously, time-poor. They speak of hefty contact hours, multiple part-time jobs, and other commitments that come from clubs, societies and extracurriculars.

When asked how often students get takeaway food, 3.15% said they do so every day. This was more common among males – 5.73% get a takeaway every day, with 17.19% getting one every few days. Overall, 58.54% of students get a takeaway at least every two weeks. 81.26% get one at least every month.

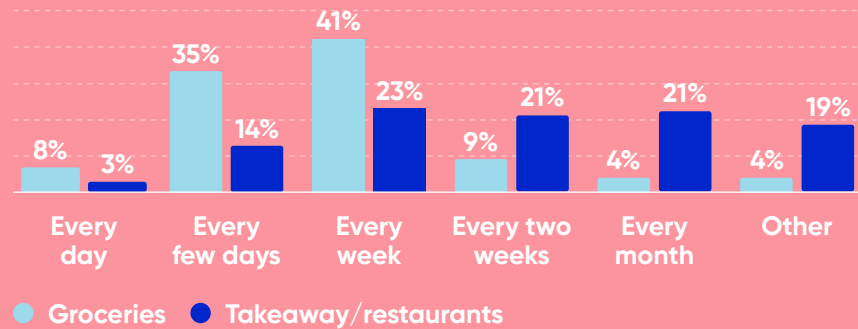
Most students cite convenience as the reason – as is the case for 20-year-old Ashikita, who gets food delivered directly to her campus in Sheffield if she's had a long day. "I have started getting more now due to the work study pressure.", she says. "I usually go for any fast food chain – the ones nearby to uni are McDonald's and Burger King... but if I'm [ordering to] my house, I would order a more fulfilling meal."

Most students we spoke to order their takeaways via apps. "Preferably I order through Deliveroo or Just Eat – I don't really like phone calls", says Hannah, 18, a first-year student at Anglia Ruskin University. Others – like Isabella – engage with their local takeaway in a more traditional way. "There's an Indian right on the corner. We'll just go and get that as they give us a student discount for coming in person."

Despite platforms like Deliveroo offering grocery deliveries, this phenomenon has yet to reach the student population. Students are still overwhelmingly likely to buy groceries in-person – 79% do this, compared to just 2% who purchase online, and 17% who mix and match. (2% actually said they never buy groceries – potentially the same cohort who frequent restaurants and takeaway every day).



Frequency of food shopping: students



Food as a cornerstone of community

It's likely that three years in lockdown enhanced this generation's appreciation for food. Throughout the pandemic's most restrictive eras, the world's menus converged online. Young TikTok users all ate the homebaked sourdough, the banana bread, and the feta pasta. Then came the Green Goddess salad, the salmon bowls. One student creator, @LazyPotNoodle, attracted the attention of Gordon Ramsay due to the intricate and high-end meals he produces – from a hotplate perched on his bed in his student dorm room. These days, digital diners are purveying slightly weirder concoctions – ice cream with olive oil, anyone? But the point is, they're eating together – these viral dishes have become rites of passage.

The DL for brands

- * Food is a big deal for students – and above all, they value convenience. Keep your marketing exciting and to-the-point at the top of the funnel – and evolve your later stages to create a swift user journey for them.
- * Don't underestimate the value of community. With one in three students living in privately-rented homes with friends, you're not just marketing to one individual. Your messaging should engage the whole flat.

- * Even if you're a household name, it's worth considering that students are new to buying food and drink for themselves – a savvy relaunch now that they're in control of their own budgets could work in your favour, a la **Burger King in 2022.**



UK Gen Zs may already have known the Burger King brand – but this campaign ignited a love for it, with thousands of students getting involved in their gamified activation that drove increased footfall to local restaurants.

Mighty multitaskers

Gen Z, we know, are digital natives. For as long as they've been discussed as a demographic, we've heard how they have never known a world without the internet. That socialising online comes as naturally to them as in-person – sometimes even more so.

83%

of Gen Z students use multiple screens at once. Students own, on average, 4 technological devices.

But our research shows that Gen Z students have a slightly more complicated relationship with the digital realm. For one thing, many of them do remember a time prior to the Internet.

"It wasn't really like this when I was a kid", says Isabella, who was born in 2004. "I mean, I was a kid, so I didn't really need to use the internet to find things out. But so many more things were advertised in person. And I would find other ways to see my friends without messaging them because most of them didn't have social media."

Flash forward to 2024, and a huge majority of students – 78% in fact – use multiple screens at once. The figure rises to 83% among Gen Z students specifically. They are digital multitaskers; constantly switching modes, and entertainment is a blended experience for many of them.

Tech ownership

We know that students have tech at their fingertips. But not a whole lot of them are buying technology regularly. In the list of categories they spent the most on, tech comes in at 6 out of 8, falling behind travel, fashion and beauty, and restaurants and takeaway. Somewhat in contradiction to this, students own an average of 4 technological devices, and record around 7.2 hours of screen time per day. So how do they get their hands on their devices?

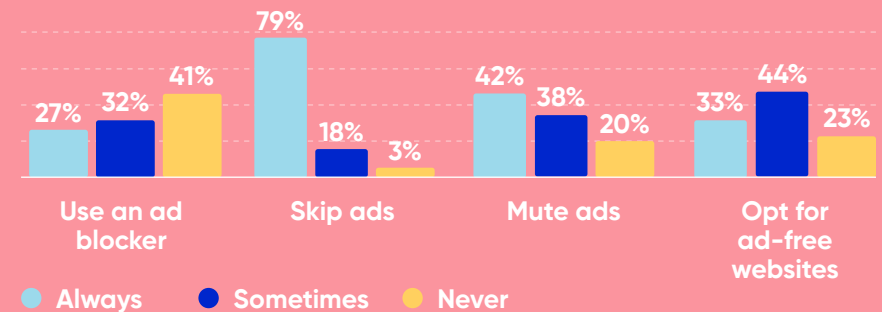
One theory is that students get their devices in one huge purchase – perhaps prior to Freshers. Another theory is that students don't actually spend money on tech themselves – a laptop or phone

carries a hefty price tag for the average 18-year-old, and often parental support is welcome on this particular type of purchase.

But there's a third possible reason why students don't automatically think of "tech" as a key spending vertical. Tech is, perhaps, something that is so ingrained within their lives that they find it hard to examine it separately from themselves. Male students, in particular, were likely to see technology and how they use it as part of their identity – 45% thought this compared to 27% of females. Males also own significantly more devices – on average, 7.

Students' attitudes to ads

How often do students...



Are Gen Z students worried about screen time?



"Sometimes I do worry. But obviously at least three hours of that day is gonna be schoolwork and then there's lectures... I use my laptop, but I make sure to try and switch things off at like nine and get in a little bit of reading before bed."

Toby, 19,
University of Hull



"I do try and make sure I get outdoor time, and make sure I'm in nature at least once a day. If I'm spending too much time, I'll put it down and I'll try to do something else."

Mari-Jeanne, 26,
Swansea University



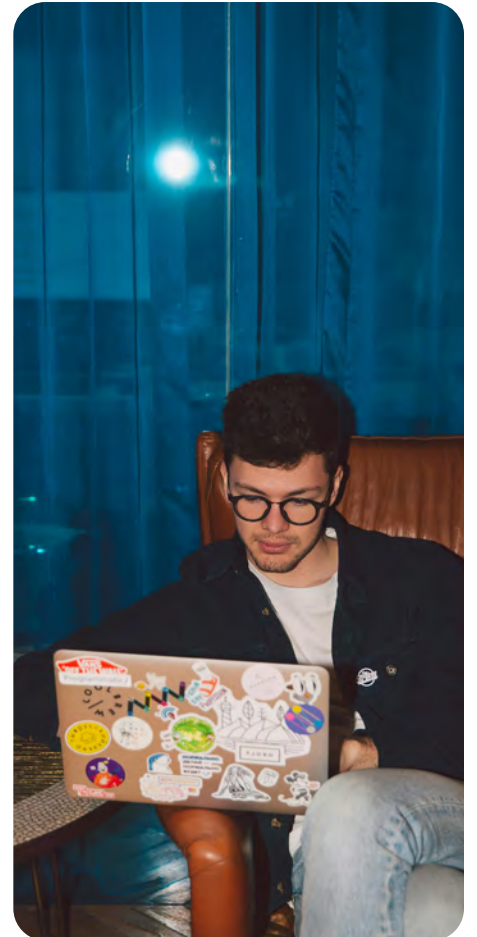
"I'm not proud. I don't have an exact number, but it's more than I'm willing to admit! But hey – most of my assignments require me to use a screen. So I'm basically bound to technology nowadays."

Leo, 23,
Bath Spa University

Digital escapism

Often, students will use the same device to complete uni work as they will to relax and unwind. I also kind of use my laptop as a downtime tool", says Isabella, who estimates she spends "a good 7 hours a day" using screens. "So I might scroll through Pinterest or play The Sims or watch YouTube – something like that." For Toby – an 18-year-old student at the University of Hull – the picture is similar. "If not uni work stuff, it's probably either having YouTube on or perhaps playing a game. I like very chill ones – cosy, kind of relaxing [games]."

In fact, gaming as a form of escapism came up a lot – and this was often an activity that students do as part of digital multitasking. "Quite a few of my housemates play Minecraft", says Isabella. "We'll be sat on the sofa [together] playing Sims and Minecraft. But it's mindless to be honest. I'm not really thinking that much when playing a game. [Sims is] certainly one of the things I do when I have the TV on".



The emotional associations that students have with different types of digital activity become clear – uni work is one thing, relaxing with a YouTube video over dinner or a quiet game on the sofa is another entirely. Screens factor into almost every aspect of their lives.

Brand-sceptics and ad avoidance

Students are worried about their screen time – but racking up 7+ hours per day is, for many of them, inevitable. When asked, most of our student interviewees expressed worry about the physical side effects – eye strain and needing glasses came up a lot – but most concluded that screen time was in some ways inevitable.

That said, it's clear that many Gen Z students feel strongly about brands encroaching on their digital territories. 60% use ad blockers, 80% mute ads between TV shows, and 77% pick websites that don't have ads where possible. An overwhelming 97% of students skip ads when given the option. "I think there was never a generation that sat down and looked forward to the adverts", says Keith Foggan, **founder of System.** "That is not a thing. The difference is that today, you can skip, you can mute, you can block, and you can choose to get your content and places that have got no ads whatsoever. So there's lots of ways you can kind of navigate media consumption without hearing from brands."



As the boundaries between these things become ever more blurred, it's important for brands to understand how they fit in – after all, students' undivided attention is the holy grail. Students don't love the idea of brands interjecting into their downtime, or worse – impeding their study sessions. You have to work extra hard to win their trust. "With Gen Zs, I think you've got to be more culturally aware than ever before", says Keith. "You have to know what's going on and find the conversations more than we ever needed to."

Sometimes, that can mean rethinking where you fit into their uni lives. There are plenty of ways to reach students when they are receptive to new ideas and experience – such as on-campus via in-person activations. Not only does this bypass ad blockers, it also taps into channels that students seek out for info, advice, and trusted directions. By meeting them in an environment where they're on the lookout for brands, you stand a better chance of resonating.

The DL for brands

- * Students love to switch directions across physical and digital channels. Think about how you can craft a multi-channel campaign to reflect this.
- * Don't be deterred by students' attitudes to ad-blockers. Take it as guidance towards the places where and when they are receptive – and activate your campaign in these spaces.

The Lady Garden Foundation's in-person Freshers activation was underpinned by a digital campaign – appealing to students' ability to switch between IRL and URL. The result? 20X increase in web traffic, and distribution targets surpassed by 31%.



Brand-new besties

At 23 years old, Leo describes himself as an “old man”. The second-year Business Management student at Bath Spa university first came to the UK from his native Peru in 2017.

He spent a few years figuring out what he wanted to do with his life. “I wasn’t sure – so I took a few gap years!” – he says.

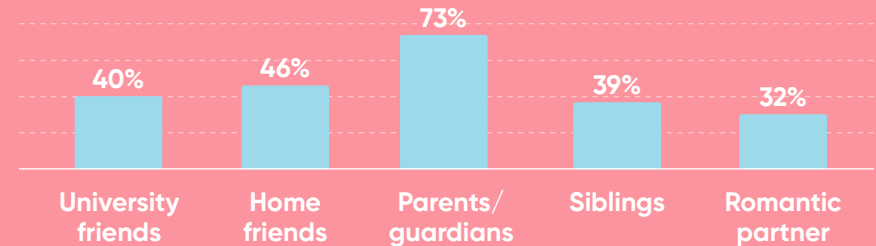
Leo was surprised at how easily friendships came to him at university. “I thought university was just studying and only studying. But actually, it’s half social and half studying”, he says. “Where I was living [before], there weren’t many young people. So I was feeling a bit lonely, and then suddenly connecting with a lot of people – even though a few years younger than me – was actually quite nice.”

60%

of students have found it easy to make friends at university

It’s a familiar story that’s played out at universities across the world for decades. Save for the Covid years, the social aspect of university life has been as great a pull as the academic one for many. This shows in students’ worries prior to coming to university; making friends topped their list, with one in three students citing it as their top concern.

Who influences students



Relationships: who influences students?

Students spoke at length about how Freshers was a rite of passage – a big step into adulthood and independence. They are, in a sense, caught between two worlds – their family unit, and their new-found friendship group. Parents still hold the most influence by a long way – 73% of students describe their caregivers as influential. Then, there’s a sharp drop-off: 46% say the same about their pre-university friends, and 40% regard their uni friends as influential. This seems low in comparison – but don’t forget, these friendships are just a few months old.



While romantic partners ranked quite low – one in three students consider theirs to be influential – it’s still not an insignificant number. It paints a picture of an emotionally-mature, adult-focused generation of students: a group that is settling down earlier, and forging long-term relationships early on in uni.

The anatomy of a uni friendship

When asked more about their uni friendships, many students describe how they benefited from the social structures that university provides. "After Freshers week, I started getting closer to my flatmates", says Leo. "Then I also started getting closer to my course mates, and joined a few societies. I mainly hang out with the Business and Management society, which is relevant to my course. I'm glad I got quite diverse friendship groups."

It hasn't been easy for everyone – some students are falling through the cracks. While 60% of students say they've found it easy to make friends at uni, and 67% believe that their uni friendships will continue after university, International and post-graduate students report difficulties in making friends.

"I'm international, and my course is just 10 students", says Ashikita. "There's a communication barrier – and they don't really show up to the class. So [it's] restrictive for me to have a normal conversation within uni. I have started communicating with them more frequently. It's like finally I can open up and talk to them. It's my second year so I can finally understand how this country works and how to communicate with people."

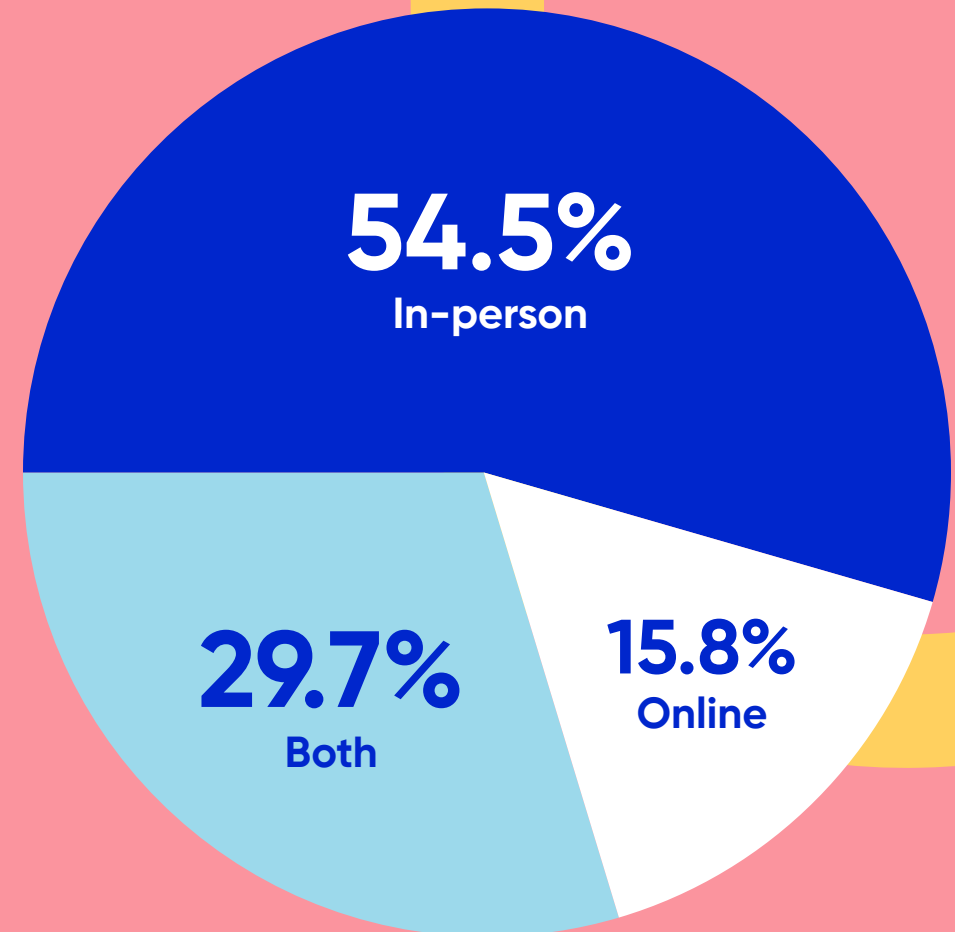
32%

of Gen Z students said making friends was their top concern prior to starting uni

Christabelle – also an international student, and also a postgraduate – has a similar experience: "For me, I would say friendship is a part that I'm struggling with. I really don't have friends and I'm not extroverted."

It's not just international and postgraduate students. For those who started uni in 2021 are now approaching graduation, and it's hard not to see the lingering effects of the pandemic years. "My uni friendships tend to be really casual", says Sarah, who did not experience Freshers due to Covid. "I don't really have really serious friendships in University – usually I'll meet up to revise or to do work. We also text, but not very frequently. We sometimes meet up to eat or for birthdays."

How do students prefer to socialise?





The in-person connection

The thought of 40% of students struggling to make friends is a bleak one – as is the idea that 33% don't believe their friendships will last. But there are glimmers of hope. Gen Z students are analytical – they have a strong sense of how they tick, and what type of socialising they prefer. Despite their high screen time, the majority (55%) prefer to socialise in-person, with 30% saying that both online and digital socialising are equally easy for them. "If I want to socialise [I'd prefer an] activity – like, let's go for a dance.", says Ashikita. "Let's go for a trip. I recently went to a Give It a Go self-defence class. That's my type of socialising!"

As digital natives, we often pigeon-hole Gen Z as being chronically online – to the point where we could assume that all of their social relationships are digital. But a big part of their friendships happen in-person – the most significant, in fact. Even those that originate online eventually consolidate in-person. "One of the highlights of my Freshers week was the first night I moved in", says Isabella. "I had two friends that I'd been chatting to for about six months on WhatsApp and got to know them a bit and we arranged to meet each other that first night. I'm still bonded with them to this day. That first night that was instant fusion – like we just got along so well and they're still my best friends to this day."

It's an important lesson for all who want to connect with – and influence – this generation. Digital is great for capturing their attention, and the initial spark. But to really create a lasting connection, IRL is integral.

67%

of students believe
their uni friendships will
continue after uni

The DL for brands

- * Friendships and connections are constantly being built at university – but Freshers is the key moment, as a week or two that's designed for meet and greets. It's a great time to be on campus – as a student, as well as a brand.
- * Think about how your brand can create connections and facilitate bonding moments. From freebies to immersive in-person activations, you can play a role in bringing students together – and establish some positive feeling for your brand in the process.



Urban Eat made use of localised language to welcome students to their new home – and offered a free lunch to create community. 38% of students reached in the campaign converted into followers on social!

Money matters

£29bn

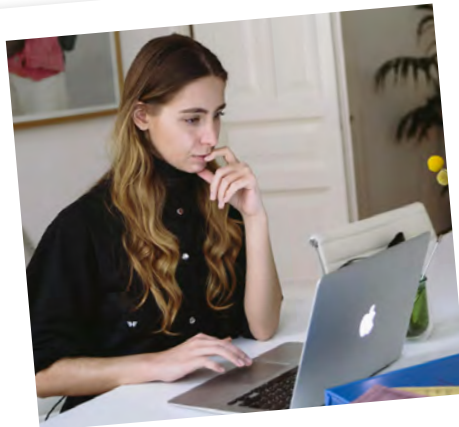
We estimate that UK students have a collective annual spending power of £29bn.

Just 17%

Just 17% of students said they were concerned about affording university.

What do students spend the most on each month?

- 1 Rent, bills + utilities
- 2 Groceries
- 3 Restaurant + takeaways
- 4 Fashion + beauty
- 5 Travel
- 6 Tech + mobile
- 7 Activities, nightlife + events
- 8 Entertainment subscriptions



How often do students shop across verticals?

Students buy groceries, restaurants and takeaway most frequently.

Female students are more likely to buy fashion and beauty regularly – 40.71% do so monthly compared to 34.90% of males.

Males, on the other hand, are more likely to make frequent tech purchases – 19.79% do so at least every two weeks.

	Every day	Every few days	Every week	Every two weeks	Every month
Groceries	7.8%	35%	41.1%	8.8%	3.6%
Restaurants & takeaways	3.2%	13.6%	22.7%	20.6%	21.2%
Fashion & beauty	0.3%	3.8%	9.8%	15.6%	38.8%
Tech & mobile	1.3%	2.5%	6.3%	6%	31.7%
Activities, nightlife & events	0.8%	8.1%	17.7%	16.1%	20.4%
Travel	15.9%	12.3%	14.1%	10.3%	20.2%

Where do students shop across verticals?

The most common vertical to shop within in-person is, by a significant margin, groceries.

Students are most likely to purchase tech and mobile products online. Students are most likely to mix and match where they buy fashion and beauty.

	Online	In-person	Both	Neither
Groceries	2.2%	79.4%	16.9%	1.5%
Restaurants & takeaways	10.8%	36.3%	43.8%	9.1%
Fashion & beauty	9.6%	32%	45.6%	12.8%
Tech & mobile	33.5%	17.9%	26.2%	22.4%
Activities, nightlife & events	10.8%	34%	32.3%	22.9%
Travel	26.4%	31.2%	27.9%	14.6%

You've met students. Now it's time to connect with them.

At native, we're your gateway to reaching students at scale.

As campus media specialists, we propel brands right to the heart of student culture – reaching them when and where they're most receptive to brand action and discovery. Our roots lie within Students' Unions, who are our partners. Whether it's via an exclusive partnership or a non-exclusive agreement, our relationships with these Students' Unions allow you to access all 2.86 million students via just one point of contact.

We hold unique insight into how student communities function in the here and now – so when you use native to connect with students, you do so from the most informed perspective.

We believe that Gen Z students are the most valuable and exciting demographic in the UK today – and we'd love to introduce you to them. To find out what we could do for your organisation:

[Get in touch today](#)





native.