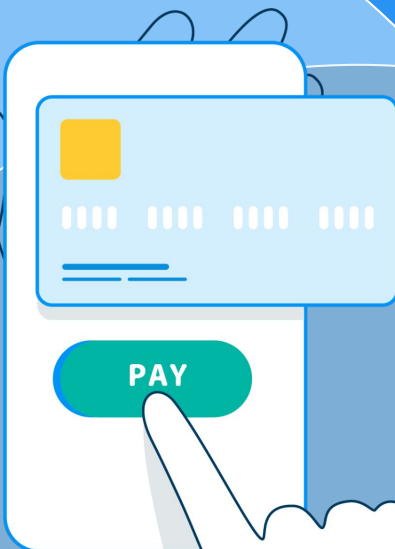


Win the Golden Quarter: 8 Consumer Spending Predictions

Turn four years of UK purchase trends into your Q4 advantage. Here's what actual consumer spending data says about the upcoming holiday season, and how your brand can capture more market share.



The Golden Quarter is stretching out

The Golden Quarter is no longer defined by a single shopping peak. Cardlytics analysed four years of UK purchase data and consumer shopping trends point to a longer, steadier shopping season. Easing utility bills have unlocked more flexibility for households, meaning strong consumer resilience is hiding behind a seemingly flat top-line. Here are the four metrics driving this shift:

-0.8%

Overall tracked spending contracted slightly to £31.8bn, marking the first dip in this series—a decrease largely driven by falling utility costs rather than a lack of consumer confidence.

+1.7%

When excluding utilities, core quarterly spending grew. Discretionary purchasing remained resilient.

65p

For every £1 households saved on essential bills like energy and broadband, 65p was redirected into other sectors.

+1.1%

The traditional nine-day Black Friday window saw modest growth, indicating a leveling out compared to the 19% surge seen the prior year.

8 Golden Quarter Predictions

1

Retail will take more share.

Total spend is flat, but if you remove lower utility bills, retail actually grows 2–3%.

**STRONG
TREND**

2

Black Friday won't grow.

It is now a flat event. Shoppers are spending more in the weeks *before* it starts.

**EMERGING
TREND**

3

More trips, smaller baskets

Transactions will rise 3–4%, but people are spending less per trip for the fourth year in a row.

**STRONG
TREND**

4

Discounters win Christmas dinner.

Discount supermarkets will pass 10% of all grocery spend, hurting the mid-market brands.

**STRONG
TREND**

5

The party moves to the pub.

Sit-down dining is dropping. Pubs will hold steady, while fast food only grows because prices went up.

**STRONG
TREND**

6

Next summer booked before Christmas

Package holidays will grow up to 10% as people book their 2027 trips early.

**STRONG
TREND**

7

A record quarter for gaming.

A massive new release will drive double-digit growth for gaming, while live event ticketing drops.

**STRONG
TREND**

8

Subscribers cancel; bills keep falling

Utility bills are falling, and direct-to-consumer subscription brands will lose 10% of their customers.

**STRONG
TREND**

1

Retail will take more share

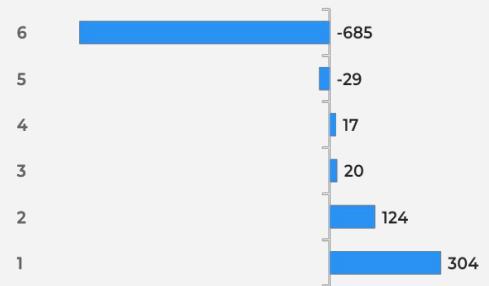
THE PREDICTION

Top-line Q4 2026 spend is projected to remain flat, landing between -1% and +1%. Excluding utilities, core spending grows 2% to 3%. This shift pushes retail past 38% of the total Golden Quarter wallet for the first time.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **The Rebound Effect:** Total spend shrank by 0.8% to £31.8bn in Q4 2025, yet non-utility spend grew 1.7%. For every £1 saved on falling energy bills, consumers redirected 65p into other sectors.
- **H1 2026 Confirmation:** This pattern repeated in the first half of 2026. Total spend dropped 1.2%, but spending excluding utilities rose 2.4% as energy costs fell another 20%.
- **Consistent Growth:** Retail's share of Q4 spending is climbing steadily, moving from 36.1% in 2022 to 37.7% in 2025.

WHERE Q4 2025 SPEND WENT VS Q4 2024 (£M)



Total -£242m.

Services +£11m and DTC -£5m not shown.

FOR ADVERTISERS

Do not misinterpret a flat headline as a weak consumer. The discretionary wallet is growing and flowing directly toward retail. Advertisers must target shoppers who now hold extra disposable income unlocked by lower household bills.

2

Black Friday won't grow.

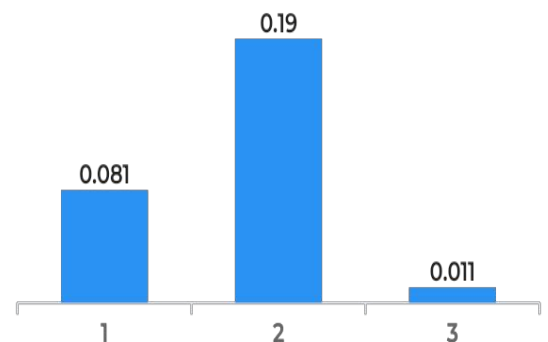
THE PREDICTION

The nine-day Black Friday window (24 November to 2 December) is projected to stay at approximately 13% of Q4 discretionary retail spend. It will grow no faster than the overall quarter, while the weeks preceding it will outpace the main event.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **Stalling Window Growth:** Black Friday window growth flattened to 1.1% in 2025, down sharply from 19.0% in 2024 and 8.1% in 2023. Its share of Q4 discretionary retail also slipped from 13.4% to 13.3%.
- **Category Shifts:** Core categories like fashion, beauty, and footwear saw window growth drop from between 18% and 28% in 2024 to roughly zero in 2025. However, these categories still grew across the full quarter.
- **Earlier Spending:** The late October payday week and the week before Black Friday have gained market share for four consecutive years. Meanwhile, the fortnight following the event has lost 1.6 percentage points.

BLACK FRIDAY WINDOW GROWTH, YOY



Nine-day window, discretionary retail. 2025: £1.36bn.

FOR ADVERTISERS

Black Friday has become a market share fight inside a fixed window. Brands must ensure they are chosen before the event begins, as 77% of Q4 discretionary retail spend now falls outside the two peak holiday windows.

3

Shoppers buy more often, not more

THE PREDICTION

Retail transactions will rise 3% to 4% while the average basket size falls for a fourth consecutive year. E-commerce is projected to grow by at least 4%, with social-commerce and cross-border marketplaces growing an additional 20% or more.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **More, Smaller Purchases:** In Q4 2025, retail transactions grew 3.5% while the average basket size shrank 0.9%. The same shoppers are buying more frequently but spending less per trip.
- **Shrinking Basket Value:** Transactions per retail customer increased from 11.0 in 2022 to 12.1 in 2025, while average basket values dropped from £30.35 to £29.14. Apparel specifically saw transactions rise 8.1% as basket size fell 3.7%.
- **The Marketplace Surge:** E-commerce grew 4.5% in Q4 2025, representing the largest gain of any segment. Marketplaces surged 30% with a 20% increase in customers, making them six times larger than they were in 2022.

RETAIL TRANSACTIONS PER CUSTOMER, Q4



FOR ADVERTISERS

Frequency is the primary growth lever. Advertisers must reward the second and third visit rather than chasing the massive basket, as the newest marketplaces will continue taking the incremental pound.

4

Discounters win Christmas dinner

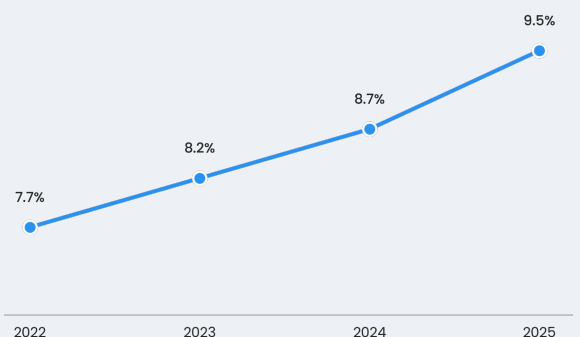
THE PREDICTION

Discounters will take a fourth consecutive year of grocery share and pass 10% of UK grocery spend. The Top 4 will hold their spend on fewer trips, Premium grocers will keep growing, and mainstream supermarkets will lose share again. Online grocery will grow through bigger orders rather than new shoppers.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **Discounter momentum:** Discounter share of Q4 grocery spend has risen every year, from 7.7% to 9.5%. In Q4 2025 discounters grew 8.6% overall and 10.3% in December, with 2.3% more customers.
- **Share is moving to the ends of the market:** The Top 4 grew spend 0.4% despite 2.5% fewer trips, and Premium grocers grew 4.6%. Mainstream supermarkets fell 4.3% in Q4 2025 and 5.8% in December. Grocery as a whole lost 2.8% of its transactions.
- **Online grows through bigger baskets:** Online grocery grew 9.7%, entirely through an 8.9% larger basket, while losing 2.9% of its customers. Discounter customer numbers grew another 5% between January and July 2026.

DISCOUNTER SHARE OF Q4 GROCERY SPEND



Mid-market grocers over the same period: 36.7% → 35.1%.

FOR ADVERTISERS

Grocery is losing trips and customers simultaneously, meaning every Christmas shop is fiercely contested. The Top 4 and Premium Grocers must aggressively reward frequency, while the mid-market must deploy targeted offers to win back the December shoppers lost to discounters.

5

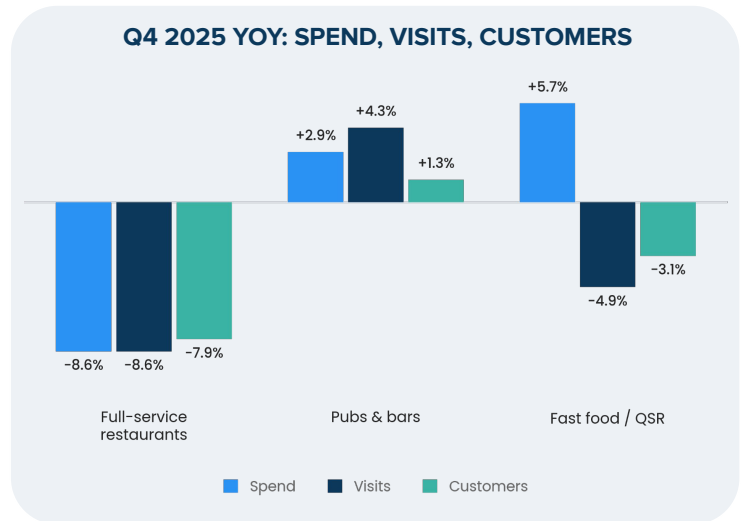
The Christmas party moves to the pub

THE PREDICTION

Full-service restaurants will decline for a second consecutive Golden Quarter. Pubs and bars are projected to hold their Christmas volume. Fast food grows strictly on price increases as its core customer base shrinks.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **Dining Declines:** Full-service dining fell 8.6% in Q4 2025 and dropped 10.9% in December, losing 7.9% of its customers. This decline continued with a 6.1% drop in the first half of 2026. Food delivery also recorded its first Q4 decline at 0.9%.
- **Pub Resilience:** Pubs and bars saw visits rise 7.8% and spend grow 5.9% in November 2025. Customer numbers grew another 12% from January to July 2026.
- **Fast Food Inflation:** Fast food grew 5.7% despite 4.9% fewer visits and 3.1% fewer customers. The average ticket reached £12.20, increasing 21% since 2022 on completely flat visit numbers.



FOR ADVERTISERS

Sit-down dining venues must win group bookings back from the pub. Fast food brands must turn a higher ticket price into more frequent visits before their customer base erodes further.

6

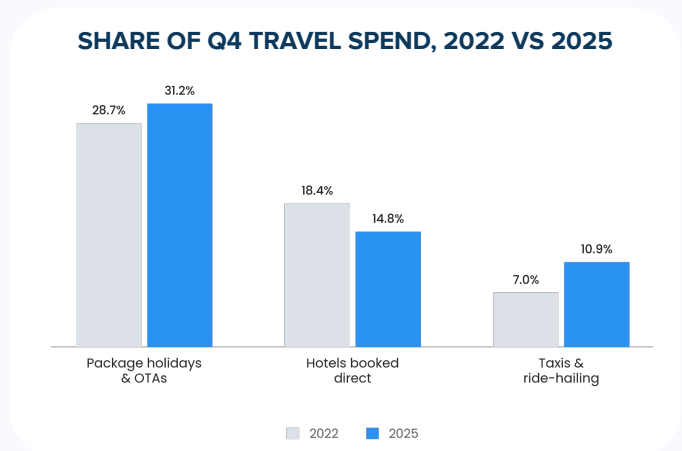
Britain books next summer before this Christmas

THE PREDICTION

Package holidays and online travel agents will grow 7% to 10% as the Q4 booking season starts earlier than ever. Taxis and ride-hailing grow 15% or more. Direct hotel bookings remain flat.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **Early Bookings:** Package holidays and online travel agents grew 7.9% in Q4 2025, capturing 8.8% more bookings. Their share of overall travel spend increased from 28.7% in 2022 to 31.2% in 2025. Customer numbers grew another 6% between January and July 2026.
- **Transit Surges:** Taxis and ride-hailing grew 23% on 21% more customers, marking a third consecutive year of double-digit growth.
- **Direct Booking Stalls:** Hotels booked directly fell 0.7%, with their overall share of travel spend down 3.6 percentage points since 2022.



FOR ADVERTISERS

Q4 is a booking season now. Reward the early 2027 booker; hotels need direct-booking offers aimed at the guests who currently reach them through an intermediary.

7

A record quarter for Gaming

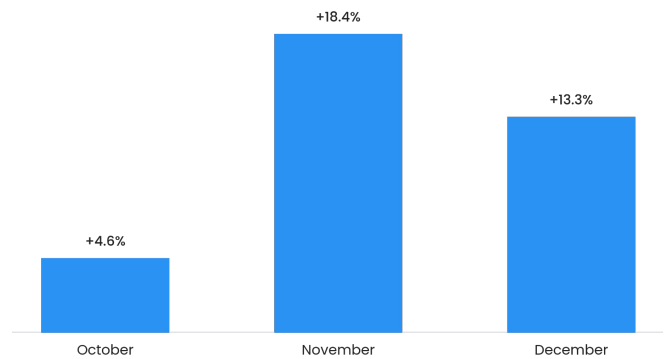
THE PREDICTION

Gaming will grow by double digits for a second consecutive year, fueled by the biggest launch of the decade landing during Black Friday week. Ticketing and live events fall again, while streaming and cinema compound at 4% to 5%.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **Gaming Momentum:** Gaming spend increased 11.6% in Q4 2025, surging 18.4% in November alone with 14.6% more customers. A major software release is scheduled for 19 November 2026 during Black Friday week. A slight lull in early 2026 indicates a market waiting for this launch rather than leaving the category.
- **Live Event Drops:** Ticketing fell 12.7% in Q4 2025, losing 15% of its customers. This decline steepened to 23% between January and July 2026.
- **Streaming Growth:** Streaming and cinema grew 4.8% on 5.3% more transactions in Q4 2025.

GAMING SPEND YOY BY MONTH, Q4 2025



Ticketing over the same months: +1.0%, -22.2%, -16.2%.

FOR ADVERTISERS

Hardware, accessories, and gaming subscription offers must be live by 1 November. Ticketing platforms need immediate strategies to re-engage the 15% of customers they lost before mid-November.

8

Subscribers cancel; bills keep falling

THE PREDICTION

Utilities will fall by double digits for a second Golden Quarter. Direct-to-consumer subscription brands will lose another 10% of their customer base. Mobile and pet food are the only exceptions showing steady growth.

WHY WE THINK SO

- **Utility Relief:** Utilities dropped 11.7% in Q4 2025, with energy falling 22% and broadband dropping 6.2%. Energy spend fell an additional 20% from January to July 2026.
- **The Subscription Cull:** Direct-to-consumer brands lost 10.7% of their customers in Q4 2025, translating to a 9.2% drop in total transactions. DTC beauty lost two in five customers, and meal-kit customers dropped 27% in the first half of 2026.
- **Isolated Growth:** Mobile grew 5.6%, adding £80m and making it the only growing telecommunications line. DTC pet food grew 10% with 3.3% more customers.

1.00m

DTC / subscription customers, Q4 2025 — down from 1.12m in 2024 (-10.7%)

-20%

Energy spend, January to July 2026 (£849m → £676m)

1.4x

DTC's Black Friday week vs its average Q4 week — its biggest acquisition moment

FOR ADVERTISERS

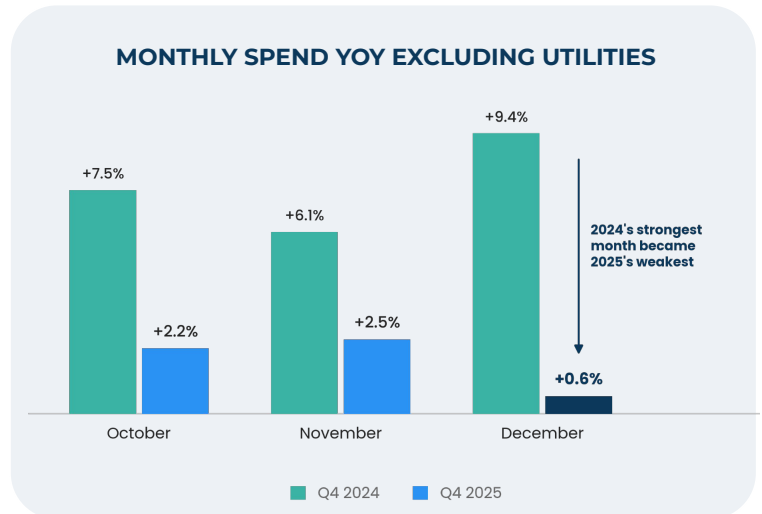
Black Friday week is the ultimate acquisition moment for subscription brands. The real job is holding the new customer through the heavy January cancellation wave. For telecommunications providers, mobile is the definitive growth category.

Will December stall again?

In 2024, December was the strongest month of the Golden Quarter. In 2025, it was the weakest. If this trend repeats, the Golden Quarter has structurally moved forward, and Christmas trading effectively means November.

WHAT WE SAW IN 2025

- **Flat Finishes:** Spend excluding utilities grew 2.2% in October and 2.5% in November, but only 0.6% in December. December was the only month where overall transactions declined, falling by 0.5%.
- **Category Drops:** Retail grew 3.2% in October and 4.1% in November, slowing to 0.9% in December. Apparel growth dropped from 7.0% in November to just 0.7% in December. Books fell 22% and toys fell 6%.
- **The Final Week:** In the seven days leading up to Christmas Eve, total spend across all categories fell 0.5%, with retail seeing a minor 0.8% increase.



FOR ADVERTISERS

Plan for a Golden Quarter that is won by the end of November. Brands waiting for a December peak will miss the opportunity entirely.

Data-driven rules to win the Golden Quarter

1

Start with the October payday.

The late-October payday week has gained share of Q4 retail spend every year since 2022, and every week before Black Friday grew in 2025, while the Black Friday window itself grew just 1.1%.

77%

of Q4 discretionary retail spend happens outside the Black Friday window and the pre-Christmas week.

DO THIS

Card-Linked Offers live from the week of 29 October, not 27 November.

2

October offers drive Christmas redemptions.

Redemptions on the Cardlytics UK network nearly doubled in Q4 2025, to 6.7m. 41% of offers were served in October; 44% were redeemed in December.

44%

of Q4 2025 offer redemptions landed in December

DO THIS

An offer that goes live in Black Friday week arrives after most of the network has been served.

3

Buy frequency, not baskets.

Only two of eight categories grew because more people bought more often. Fast food's +21% ticket on flat visits is growth on borrowed time.

12.1

retail transactions per customer in Q4 2025, up from 11.0 in 2022.

DO THIS

Use Cardlytics Insights to find lapsed and switching customers — then reward the second visit.

Plan a longer Golden Quarter with us.

Card-Linked Offers put your brand in front of 23 million UK bank customers at the exact moment they decide where to spend. Cardlytics Insights shows you which of those customers lapsed, switched, or shopped the competition last Golden Quarter. You get this intelligence before the new season even starts.

ABOUT CARDLYTICS

Cardlytics (NASDAQ: CDLX) is a purchase intelligence platform that transforms \$5.8 trillion in annual transaction data into smarter growth strategies for brands and more rewarding experiences for consumers. With visibility into one of every two card-based transactions in the U.S. and U.K., Cardlytics delivers the scale and depth of purchase intelligence that no other platform can match. Brands activate that intelligence through personalized, card-linked offers that drive measurable results across leading banking and commerce platforms worldwide. Since 2008, Cardlytics has delivered \$1.2 billion in rewards to consumers. Learn more at www.cardlytics.com or follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

