

GAMING

In the hands of student gamers,
new worlds open, connections
spark and choices matter

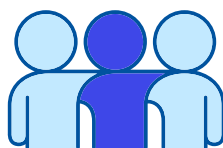


Introduction

Gaming is a cultural cornerstone for UK Gen Z students. It shapes how they socialise, express identity and navigate university life. In a UNiDAYS survey of 1,005 UK students in October 2024, every respondent played video games; 1 in 3 played daily and 2 in 3 said gaming supports their mental health and wellbeing. University is a moment of transition where routines and loyalties crystallise. Behaviours set here become long-term consumer choices in a category worth billions.



100% play at least
occasionally



1 in 3 game daily



75% play at least
once a week

Sources: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 (1)

Commercially, the scale is clear. Gen Z already accounts for 43% of UK gaming spend each month. This equates to £279m monthly at an average of £48 per head. For this audience, gaming is not a casual extra. It is a budget line and a source of belonging. For brands, the university years are a decisive window to build positive associations and secure loyalty that lasts beyond campus.

**£3.4bn annual UK Gen Z
gaming spend**

43% of entire UK market

£279m Total Gen Z monthly spend

**£48.10 Average individual monthly
spend**

Sources: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 (2), ukie 2023 Video Game Industry Valuation Report April 2024 (3)

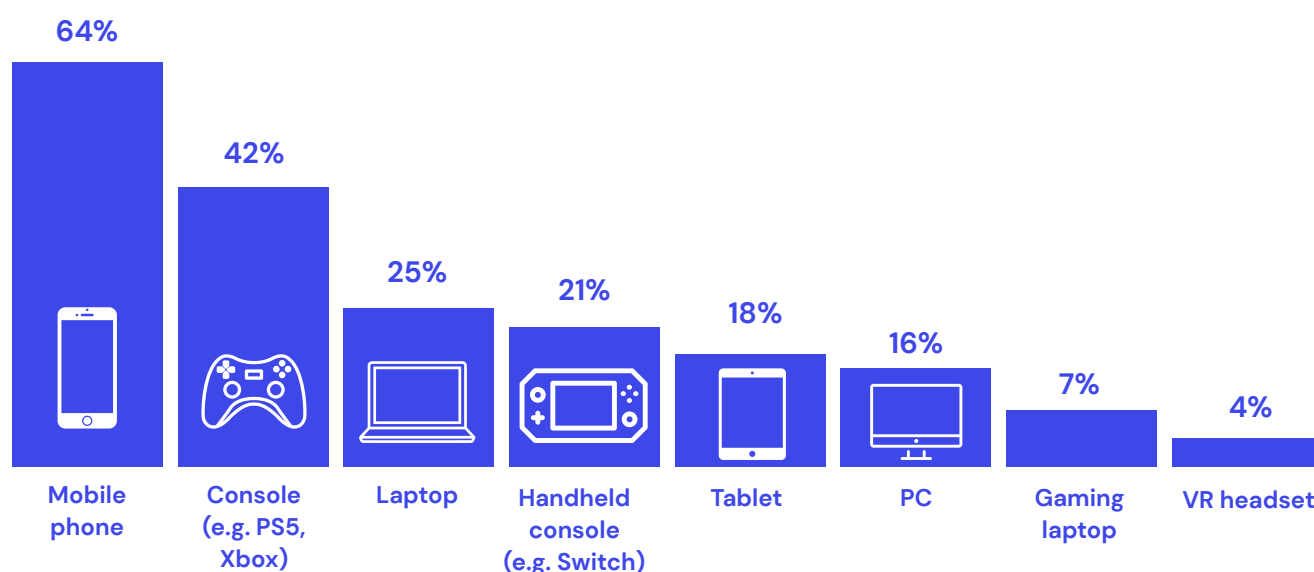
The Student Gaming Market: Size, Spend and Resilience

Within a typical UK student budget of £1,104 per month, £140+ goes to entertainment and leisure. Gaming consistently takes a meaningful share of that discretionary spend. Average Gen Z gaming spend is estimated at £48.10 per month, equivalent to about 4% of a student budget and almost equal to the amount set aside for going out. ^[4,5]

Spend within the category is fragmented but revealing. Consoles attract the deepest investment, with digital revenues growing in 2024, supported by online ecosystems like Game Pass and PS Plus ^[6]. Mobile reaches widest, grows fastest and is the entry point for most daily play ^[7]. PC spend is flatter but key for esports and indie discovery ^[8]. Digital is now the default (83%+ of console purchases); with physical sales a minority ^[9]. Over half of students use 2 or more devices, and 1 in 4 use 3 or more ^[10]. Cross-platform players are typically more loyal and higher value, underlining the importance of strategies that engage students seamlessly across mobile, console and PC. ^[11]

WHAT DEVICE(S) DO UK STUDENTS PREDOMINANTLY USE TO PLAY GAMES?

Source: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 ^[12]



What stands out is not just scale but resilience. In the UK, Gen Z monthly spend increased in 2024 even as living costs rose ^[13]. More recently, global data signals a slowdown, with spend among 18–24s declining year on year as value consciousness grows ^[14]. Taken together, the picture is of a market that remains non-negotiable for students in the UK, but one where subscriptions, free-to-play models and affordable social titles increasingly influence how budgets are allocated. For AAA publishers, the implication is clear: the spend is there, but it is finite. Winning share requires gaining trust and excitement early, converting anticipation into pre-orders, generating cultural buzz, and standing out at launch in an intensely competitive environment.

Gaming as Social Infrastructure On-Campus

For students, gaming is social fabric as much as entertainment. Among weekly gamers, 2 in 5 spend more than 2 hours each week playing, and nearly a quarter say they do so specifically to connect with friends. It has become a dominant shared language, with 76% of young people discussing video games with peers, compared to just 29% who talk about books.



43% of student weekly gamers play for +2hrs per week



23% of students game socially to build or maintain friendships



76% of young people discuss video games with friends

Sources: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 [15], National Literacy Trust [16]

Organised gaming communities have become a key element of student life. Today, more than 110 universities participate in the British University Esports Championship (BUEC) each year, competing across multiple titles in a league that sees thousands of matches played annually. Gaming societies thrive across campuses, with some institutions now offering esports scholarships and dedicated facilities. Examples within the Eighteen24 network include the University of Roehampton, which provides esports bursaries, and the University of Warwick, which has created one of the UK's first standalone esports centres. These developments highlight gaming's growing role as a framework for inclusive, engaged student communities.

Peer influence amplifies this culture. Students often choose friends based on shared gaming interests and adopt the platforms and titles their networks are already playing. 70% of Gen Z say they have met new people through gaming, and nearly 2 in 3 report meeting a good friend or partner this way. For brands, these peer networks function as powerful word-of-mouth engines, authentic spaces where conversations and recommendations spread rapidly across campus.



58% of Gen Z consider gaming their main social space, outranking messaging apps and social media



70% of Gen Z report meeting new people through gaming



63% of Gen Z say they met a good friend or partner through gaming

Sources: SQ Magazine, Gen Z Gaming Platform Preferences Statistics [17]

University: A Golden Window That Shapes Long-Term Loyalty

For students, gaming is a trusted outlet during one of life's most demanding transitions. It is where they turn to relax, have fun and escape. Gaming helps them manage pressure, explore new worlds and stay connected. It also supports continuity in friendships, allowing students to maintain ties with old networks while anchoring themselves in new communities. In the high-pressure environment of exams, deadlines, financial strain and new independence, gaming provides stability, discovery and connection.

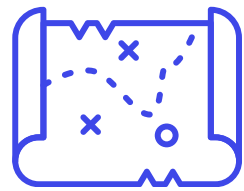
WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR PLAYING VIDEO GAMES?



77% play to have fun
(primary reason)



66% use video games to relax
and manage stress
(second most popular reason)



3rd most popular reason
given for playing is to
escape, discover, explore

Source: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 [18]

For brands, this creates a golden window. University years coincide with the 18–21 stage when the brain is at peak adaptability. At this age, students are open to new experiences, faster to form habits, and memory function is at its strongest. Choices made here are not just short term; they are more likely to last. When gaming provides comfort, fun or inspiration at this stage, it builds positive associations that continue well beyond campus. Brands that connect meaningfully in this moment can turn early relevance into long-term preference and advocacy as students progress into adult life and higher spending years.



**Escape, connection and joy today
become brand preference
tomorrow**

Identity and Aspiration: Expression That Converts

Gaming isn't only a source of entertainment and connection, it is also a platform for self-expression. Through avatars, skins and customisation, students experiment with how they want to be seen, build confidence and explore identities that may feel less accessible in real life. This creates a powerful psychological bond between personal identity and the brands that enable that expression.

The scale of investment underlines the point. Students consistently allocate part of their limited budgets to in-game content tied to identity, status and belonging. These purchases often deliver no real gameplay advantage and exist purely as aesthetic choices, yet they carry the same weight as other lifestyle decisions, showing how strongly gaming supports identity development during formative years.



52% of Gen Z gamers spend on in-game customisation



60% of gamers say self expression through gameplay is more important than ever



£22 avg. spend per month by gamers on in-game content

Sources: SQ Magazine (2025) Gen Z Gaming Platform Preferences [19], Fandom Report (2024) [20], Censuswide poll for TSB (2024) [21]

Gaming also shapes ambition. Tournament participation sparks career interest, with 88% of students reporting increased interest in gaming careers and almost half saying they are more drawn to the creative industries as a whole^[22]. More than half believe careers in esports are more accessible than traditional fields such as law or engineering^[23]. With the UK games industry employing 73,000 people across 2,000 businesses and growing by 4.8% in 2024, students increasingly see gaming as a credible professional pathway^[24]. They recognise that opportunities extend beyond professional play into technology, design, business operations and content creation, all of which align closely with skills developed through university study.

Creative participation reinforces this trajectory. 4 in 5 students engage with games that include user generated content, and one in six actively create it^[25]. Whether designing mods, building in-game assets, writing scripts or producing fan fiction, students use gaming to practice creativity, leadership and collaboration, while gaining validation through peer recognition.

For brands the link is clear. At university, gaming is not just a pastime but a trusted space where students build identity, develop creative skills and shape ambitions, turning creative play into future pathways that brands can be part of.

Mobile Dominates, but Multi-Platform Defines Engagement

Mobile gaming now holds near-universal reach among students, with 9 in 10 engaging at least occasionally and almost two thirds naming it their most used platform. Its appeal is rooted in convenience: students already own the device, no extra investment is required, and games are always on hand between lectures, during commutes or in social downtime. Mobile also integrates naturally with social media, making it a hub for quick-play sessions and shared moments.



90% of student gamers play mobile games



62% of students play mobile games at least once a week



75% choose mobile as preferred gaming device for convenience & **45%** game on the go

Sources: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 (26)

Consoles continue to play a distinct role. Around 4 in 10 students use them regularly, and within this group spending is highest. Consoles deliver immersive experiences, high production values and structured social play that mobile cannot match, making them the default for blockbuster titles, local multiplayer and shared living-room gaming. PCs, while smaller in share, remain important for competitive play, esports and performance gaming.



42% of student gamers regularly use consoles



22% of Gen Z invest more than £18.50 per month in console gaming compared with just **8%** of mobile-only players



66% of students who game using a PC said it was their #1 device due to its superior performance

Sources: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 (27), SQ Magazine 2025 (28), Newzoo 2024 (29), UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 (30)

Most students are not tied to a single device. More than half use multiple platforms, switching according to context: mobile for convenience and stress relief, consoles for immersive or social sessions, and PCs for competitive or creative pursuits. The shift to digital has made this easier than ever, with more than 80% of console purchases now digital and physical sales reduced to a minority.

57% of Gen Z use two or more devices for gaming

26% use three or more devices



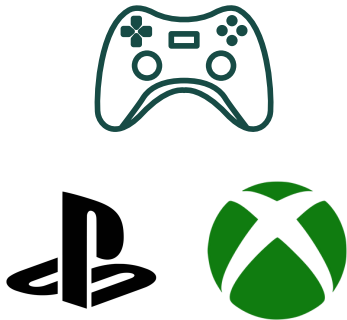
23% of Gen Z use both a mobile phone and home console to game

Sources: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 (31)

For brands, the opportunity lies in recognising that platform choice is contextual rather than exclusive. Students engage across devices throughout the week, creating multiple touchpoints for campaigns that reach them in the right moments and mindsets.

Gaming Platforms

The student gaming market is shaped not only by the titles played but by the platforms that define the ecosystem. Most students arrive with preferences formed at home or school, but university is when these choices are reinforced or reshaped. Shared flats, societies and new networks create powerful peer effects, with groups often consolidating around a single platform. With digital now the default and subscription or free-to-play models reshaping engagement, university becomes a decisive moment for platform owners to secure or convert loyalty and capture long-term value.



PlayStation: Anchored in blockbuster exclusives like God of War and Spider-Man. Known for cinematic, high-production experiences that create cultural moments and drive shared play in student living rooms, while also offering the broadest software library.

Xbox: Defined by Game Pass, which offers day-one access to hundreds of titles across console, PC and cloud. Strong appeal for students who value variety, affordability and cross-device play. Backward compatibility adds depth to its ecosystem.

Nintendo has a longstanding reputation for accessible, portable social gaming that cuts across demographics and appeals to mixed friendship groups.

Switch 2 (June25) builds on the original Switch's 120m+ install base with upgraded performance and new communication tools, reinforcing Nintendo's hybrid role in campus and shared spaces. Most likely to be carried between homes, lectures and friends' flats, Nintendo thrives as a cultural connector and source of local group play.



On **PC**, Steam dominates distribution, with Epic and GOG competing for share through exclusives and discounts. Associated with esports, competitive play and indie discovery, all of which are popular among student communities. Hardware and storefront choices made during university often persist into professional life, giving the PC ecosystem long-term influence.

VR remains a smaller segment in student life, but visibility is growing as hardware improves and costs fall. Meta's Oxford Street flagship announcement signals ambition to mainstream VR adoption in the UK. For students, VR carries novelty, status and early-adopter identity. Embedding use at university could shape expectations for future purchase cycles.

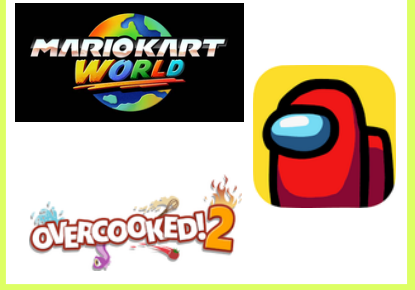


Genres that Shape Student Play

Students' genre choices mirror their social priorities and creative instincts.

Co-op, Casual and Party Games are the most popular, attracting 46% of student gamers. [32]

Their appeal lies in accessibility, ease of play in groups, and their role in bringing people together during campus social moments.



Immersive genres are close behind.

Action-adventure titles engage 42% of students, valued for their stress-relieving qualities and narrative escapism.

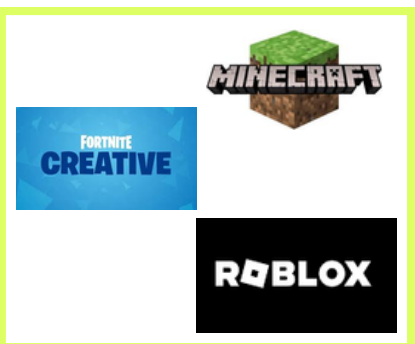
Simulation and sports attract 37% often providing common ground for friendship groups and identity cues through team affiliations or creative world-building.

Role-Playing Games reach 35% giving students structured opportunities to experiment during a formative life stage.

Source: UNiDAYS Gaming Report 2024 [33]

Creative participation adds another layer.

Four in five students play games with user-generated content and 16% actively create it, from mods to in-game designs and fan fiction. These behaviours highlight gaming's dual role as entertainment and creative outlet, giving students a sense of authorship and validation from their peers. [34]



Online shooters remain a cornerstone of student gaming, particularly among male audiences.

Call of Duty, Fortnite and Valorant dominate shared play sessions, with annual releases and live-service models keeping engagement high. These titles are often the centrepiece for gaming societies and esports competitions, reinforcing their role in campus culture.

Strategy, MOBA and Fighting Games attract smaller but highly committed student audiences. League of Legends and Dota 2 anchor university esports, while mobile hits like Clash Royale sustain daily play. Though not the largest genres, they punch above their weight by driving campus esports culture and rewarding mastery.



Digital Models: Access, Content and Speed

Game purchasing is now overwhelmingly digital. 95% of UK sales are online, with consoles shifting to disc-less models, PC entirely digital, and mobile and VR native to digital storefronts. For students, this means instant access, frequent sales, no physical storage pressures and seamless social integration. Access models now define engagement.

Connectivity is critical. Modern releases often exceed 100GB and cloud or multiplayer need consistent speed. At home, weaker broadband can delay play. On-campus, Students' Unions provide high-speed Wi-Fi, giving students confidence that acting on a brand prompt is practical. They can download, subscribe or trial immediately. Big installs still take time, but the infrastructure removes barriers to action.

Subscriptions are central. Three in four console gamers and two in three PC gamers subscribe to at least one service. Predictable costs and large catalogues suit student budgets, while Game Pass and PlayStation Plus anchor ecosystems. Entertainment platforms are also moving in, with Netflix and Amazon Prime adding gaming to their bundles to deepen Gen Z engagement.



74% of console gamers and 66% of PC gamers subscribe to at least one gaming subscription service



75% of global online gaming revenue comes from in-game purchases



63% of students change brand choices based on deals, and half use promotions to trial new products.

Sources: SQ Magazine 2025 Gen Z Gaming Platform Preferences [35] J.P. Morgan Game On [36] WARC: Consumer Price Sensitivity Is Growing [37]

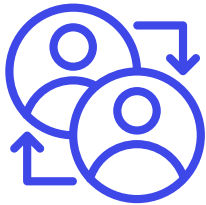
Free-to-play and live-service titles dominate. Globally 75% of online gaming revenue comes from in-game purchases, and students mirror the trend. Annual spend averages £116 per gamer, with 41% directed to cosmetics and personalisation^[38]. These models tie games to identity and community, while live-services such as GTA Online and World of Warcraft extend play through constant updates and seasonal drops.

AAA blockbusters remain cultural milestones. Releases such as Assassin's Creed, God of War and Super Mario command £60-£70 pricing and rely on pre-order to build early demand. On campus, peer influence amplifies launch, with groups committing to play together. Indies thrive at lower price points, offering originality and discovery that fit student budgets.

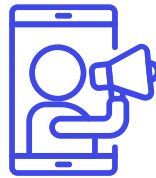
Price sensitivity shapes decisions. 63% of students change brand choices based on deals, and half use promotions to trial. Yet when games deliver connection, creativity or emotional support, students stretch budgets beyond expectations.

Discovery and Influence

Discovering new games is as much about community as it is about content for student Gen Z. Peer networks remain the most powerful driver, with conversations, shared play sessions and observed gameplay carrying more weight than traditional advertising because recommendations come from trusted peers.



38% hear about new gaming titles through friends



160m views globally for #TikTokMadeMePlayIt



33% of UK students have made purchases based on creator endorsements

Sources: Kantar [39] TikTok [40], The Drum [41]

Social platforms drive discovery. TikTok delivers fast bursts of attention through short-form video, while Twitch builds sustained engagement through live play, creator interaction and community participation. On-campus, full-motion DOOH brings video into shared, trusted spaces, showcasing content on premium screens and sparking peer conversations that validate interest before trial or purchase.

Creators and influencers extend this loop. One in three UK students have purchased on creator endorsements, rising to 40% among enthusiasts. Gaming influencers are the most followed creator category among men 18–34, yet peer input still matters: discovery may come from creators, but decisions are often reinforced by friends.

Many students do not identify as “gamers”. UNiDAYS data shows most class themselves as casual players, dipping in and out of mobile, puzzle or party titles. Smart brands want to reach all students. On-campus, full-motion DOOH unites casual and committed players in trusted, high-dwell time spaces.



On campus, OOH transforms discovery from one-to-one into one-to-many

Unlike one-to-one targeting on personal screens, OOH creates shared moments where groups discover together, sparking instant conversations. With purchasing now almost entirely digital, campus screens also bridge to action: QR codes, offers and sign-up prompts match students’ habits of instant download and trial.

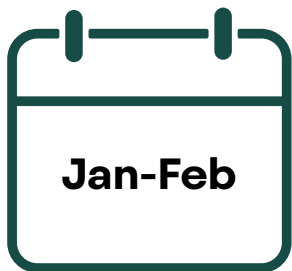
The Academic Year: Gaming's Natural Rhythm

The student calendar shapes when and how games are played, discovered and purchased. From Freshers socialising to revision stress and summer downtime, each term brings distinctive behaviours and mindsets. Aligning with these rhythms ensures relevance, momentum and maximum impact.



- Freshers Week, start of term, new routines, society sign-ups, and friendship groups
- Gaming helps students bond and settle into campus life
- Big releases and platform choices often set the foundations for what groups play together across the rest of the year

- High social activity, first-term bonding, pre-holiday spending
- Continued AAA releases, Black Friday promotions, Christmas sales push
- Games are purchased to join in with new friendship groups, with gift buying and seasonal promos reinforcing momentum



- Return from holidays, disposable gift money, part-time work income, winter pressures
- Game of the Year re-releases, subscription library refreshers
- AAA title drops for example Resident Evil 9 confirmed for Feb26

- Mid-year exams, coursework deadlines, revision stress
- Gaming offers escape and connection at peak pressure points
- This is when 007 First Light and Grand Theft Auto VI will arrive in 2026, creating cultural moments on campus



- Summer term, dissertations, graduation build-up, career preparation for those nearing the end of their studies
- Brands can connect gaming to identity and aspiration, speaking to students as they look ahead
- Nintendo launched Switch 2 in June 2025, becoming the fastest-selling console ever and proving major launches can thrive outside traditional windows

- Long summer break, return home, more free time, festivals
- Quieter release schedule, more reliance on subscription catalogues and live service engagement
- Students reconnect with school friends, play nostalgic titles, and engage deeply with games during extended downtime

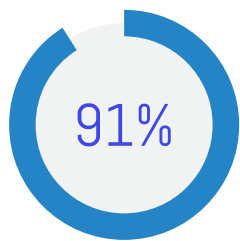


Meet Eighteen24, Specialists in Student Engagement

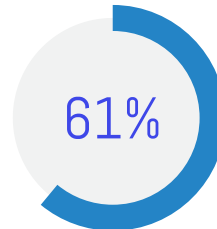
Gaming is integral to student life. Almost every student plays, from quick mobile sessions and party games to AAA releases and esports. It offers comfort, connection, escape and self-expression during the formative years when habits and loyalties take shape. Discovery flows through peer networks and shared experiences fuel gaming culture.

Eighteen24 helps gaming brands capture that influence and turn it into action. We operate the largest digital screen network in UK Students' Unions, reaching over 70% of the nation's 3m students. Our premium full-motion D6 screens sit in high dwell spaces where students naturally gather, including cafes, study areas, gyms and social hubs at the heart of campus.

Here gaming campaigns are experienced together rather than in isolation. Messages feel part of the environment not an interruption. With guaranteed visibility, zero wastage and immediate paths to action through QR and mobile integration, we cut through, spark conversation and build lasting affinity with this high-value audience.



Student Noticeboard:
91% agree E24 screens are useful for staying informed



Driving WOM
61% have discussed something seen on the E24 screens with a friend or course mate

Source: Eighteen24 Student Survey 2025 (n=50) [42]



Lords of the Fallen (CI Games Group / Hexworks)

Minimal budget. Maximum impact

CI Games focused almost entirely on targeted OOH, including a national campaign with E24. Despite limited spend and competition from bigger budget titles (e.g. *Lies of P*), the game sold 1 million copies in just 10 days – **becoming the most successful new IP launch of 2023 and driving 83% of the publisher's total sales that year.**

The Division (Ubisoft)

OOH-first strategy = Franchise-defining results

Ubisoft led with OOH, using E24 for on-campus DOOH. **It became their most successful new IP launch ever – over \$330m in global revenue in just 5 days, with \$130m from Steam alone.**



Why E24 Delivers Standout for Gaming Brands

We know that cutting through the noise during a game launch is harder than ever, especially with Gen Z. Our network offers three key strengths that makes it especially powerful for gaming brands looking to connect with this high value audience.



UNMATCHED STUDENT REACH AND RELEVANCE

Eighteen24 delivers 100% Gen Z exposure in trusted campus spaces, reaching over 70% of UK students through premium full-motion screens inside Students' Unions where gaming conversations and decisions naturally happen



SHARED IMPACT THAT SPARKS MOMENTUM

E24 screens turn gaming trailers and content into collective experiences. Seen together in high-dwell social spaces, campaigns trigger peer discussion and group validation that accelerate discovery and drive uptake



INSTANT PATHWAYS FROM AWARENESS TO PLAY

With almost all purchases now digital, E24 placements combine cultural visibility with immediate action, QR, sign-ups, discount bundles and mobile integrations make it simple for students to trial, download or subscribe on the spot

Our Formula for Effective Gen Z Engagement:

Reach 70% of the student population nationwide with Eighteen24, that's over 2 million students across all years, courses and campuses. Connect where they play, share, stream and recommend.

Be where they **are**

2 million+ unique students passing our campus screens each week

Be where they **care**

Located within Students' Unions in the heart of campus

Be where they **share**

Positioned in high - dwell areas
(Cafes, gyms, study areas etc)

Be where they **see you**

Premium full motion D6 screens in high impact environments



Make it Immersive

Use the full motion capability
Show real gameplay and tap into cultural moments that feel authentic to student players



Make it Social

Create shared moments that spark peer conversation and group discovery



Make it Seamless

Connect cultural relevance to instant digital action across devices

Don't Miss the Moment to be chosen where students play, share and decide what to download next

Gaming isn't a side interest for students. It's where friendships form, loyalties are set, identities shaped and trends spread at speed. The student years help decide which platforms, franchises and ecosystems they carry forward into future life.

Eighteen24 puts gaming brands at the heart of student culture, where peer influence drives discovery and shared experiences build loyalty.

Talk to us about how your brand can win the game:

sales@eighteen24.com



Follow us on LinkedIn for regular insights

Eighteen²⁴

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