

# CONSUMER ELECTRONICS

Powering connection, creativity and control across the student years



## Introduction

Technology is the backbone of student life. From laptops that power deadlines to phones that shape connection, consumer electronics underpin how students learn, live and express themselves. These devices are more than functional, they're personal tools of independence, identity and belonging. A phone is their planner, their camera and their comfort zone. A laptop is their studio, lecture hall and social space, carrying emotional as well as practical value in how students manage their time, money and wellbeing.

University is often the first time many young adults make significant tech purchases independently. The decisions they make here, including the products they choose, the tools they depend on and the ways they buy and pay, shape habits that last well beyond graduation. For brands, these are formative years when visibility, relevance and trust build the foundations of lifetime value.

This paper explores how Gen Z and UK students interact with technology today: the devices they prioritise, the motivations behind their choices, and how consumer-electronics brands can connect authentically with student life.



**Seeds sown at university continue to grow long after graduation**

## The Market Opportunity

Consumer electronics are one of the UK's most dynamic retail categories, valued at around £25 billion and forecast to exceed £31 billion by 2030<sup>[1]</sup>. Smartphones remain the largest segment, with a 54% revenue share, followed by laptops and gaming hardware, while e-readers and wearables continue to post the fastest growth<sup>[2]</sup>.

Within that total, students represent a disproportionately valuable audience. More than 2.9 million are currently enrolled in UK higher education<sup>[3]</sup>, and almost all rely daily on multiple connected devices.



**92% use laptops and  
73% use smartphones** for learning



**+46%** of 18–24s in Britain  
own a smartwatch



**85%** of 16–24s play games, with  
gaming hardware representing a  
significant category spend

Sources: Jisc Survey Findings [4], YouGov UK 2025 [5], Ofcom 2025 [6]

Collectively, UK students hold £6.9 billion in annual discretionary spending power<sup>[7]</sup>. Consumer electronics account for a consistent and high-value share of that spend, peaking during the return-to-campus period and continuing year-round as devices are upgraded, repaired and personalised.

For brands, this continuity is important. Student spending is not a seasonal spike but an ongoing cycle of need and aspiration that evolves throughout the university years.

Beyond short-term spend, students represent significant long-term value. Graduates go on to earn around a third more than non-graduates by age thirty, a gap that widens over time. Research shows that technology habits formed during university endure as incomes rise, creating a compound return for brands that build relevance and trust early.



**Graduates earn 31% more than  
non-graduates by age 30**

Source: Department for Education, Graduate Labour  
Market Statistics 2024 [8]

# Category Segments

Technology underpins both the practical and social sides of student life, from the hardware of independence to the tools of connection.

## Smartphones & Accessories

Daily essentials for communication, payments, entertainment and creation. Replacement cycles are shaped by trade-in offers, financing and new launches, with refurbished models appealing to value-conscious buyers. Students often build ecosystems across phones, earbuds and wearables, choosing brands that sync smoothly with study and social life.



## Laptops, PCs, Tablets & E-readers

Core study infrastructure. Laptops lead for portability, PCs for performance and e-readers for focused, low glare reading. Pre-term peaks dominate, shaped by performance needs, reliability and growing expectations around hybrid learning and AI-assisted study tools.

## Gaming & Software Ecosystems

A high engagement leisure category where social connection and competition drive loyalty. UK student gaming participation is near universal, with one in three playing daily.

[Explore our gaming white paper to discover more](#)

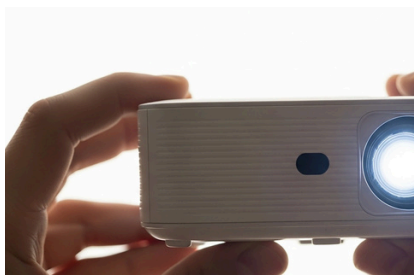


## Wearables & Hearables

Devices that support productivity, health and self-expression. Smartwatch adoption among 18-24s has almost doubled in three years, while audio products remain everyday essentials for study, travel and downtime. Together, audio and wearables create a personalised ecosystem that links seamlessly with phones, laptops and apps.

## Home & Lifestyle Electronics

TVs, sound systems, smart speakers, air fryers, mini fridges, fans, heaters and personal lifestyle tech such as haircare tools or compact cleaning devices shape the comfort and community of shared student living. These are practical purchases, often made collectively, but influential in daily quality-of-life decisions.



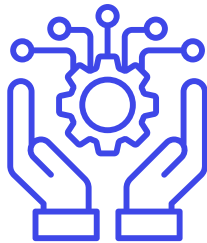
## Retro & Vintage Tech

Point-and-shoot cameras, record players, heritage audio and mini projectors reflect a broader appetite for creativity and nostalgia. Their resurgence shows how students combine digital convenience with tactile experience, balancing innovation with personal expression.

## Motivations and Mindsets

Technology shapes how students study, communicate and express themselves. It supports deadlines, creativity and social connection, but it also represents freedom, identity and ambition. Devices are chosen not only for what they do, but for how they help students feel organised, confident and in control of their day. The right tools bring clarity and momentum, helping them manage the demands and opportunities of university life.

Students are deliberate in how they spend, yet they remain motivated by curiosity and progress. They look for performance they can rely on and quality they can feel. Camera capability, processing speed and design detail continue to influence choice, but only when matched by substance. Innovation resonates when it enhances how they study, create or share experiences, and when it supports balance across busy terms. Noise-cancelling audio, air purifiers, styling tools and small home devices all play a role in how students manage energy, comfort and confidence.



**63% of students** buy tech to improve how they create, learn or connect



**71% of UK Gen Z** say new technology excites them



**58% of students** cite camera quality as a key reason to upgrade a phone

Sources: UNiDAYS Q4 2024 Student Insight Report [9], Dentsu EMEA Consumer Navigator Q1 2025 [10], UNiDAYS Tech Deep Dive Q2 2024 [11]

Personalisation also matters. From audio and accessories to wearables and laptop setups, students favour technology that reflects identity and adapts to their routines. They want products that feel intuitive, supportive and seamlessly connected to the rest of their lives.

Value remains a constant consideration, though not the only one. Students assess affordability alongside fairness and transparency. They appreciate brands that help them access premium products through trade-in schemes, financing or clear student offers. Accessible pricing and simple pathways to ownership have become part of what defines a credible brand.

Sustainability has moved from principle to practicality. Students want devices that last and brands that act responsibly, but they also recognise the importance of performance and pace. Repairability, energy efficiency and longer lifespans are seen as signs of quality, not compromise.

Across campus, technology supports focus, creativity and moments of calm. It enables community as much as independence. University is where these motivations come together, and where lasting brand relevance begins to take shape.



## Refurbished and Repairable

Cost-of-living pressures and rising environmental awareness have reshaped how students think about technology ownership. Refurbished is no longer a compromise; it's a smart, sustainable and socially accepted choice that aligns with student values and budgets. The circular economy has moved from niche to normal, and students are leading that shift.

Across the UK, refurbished tech has become mainstream. In 2024, one in four smartphones sold were refurbished, up from 19% in 2021, and marketplaces such as Back Market now hold a significant share of online refurbished sales <sup>[12]</sup>. Students are also extending this approach beyond phones, choosing refurbished laptops, tablets, audio products and small home devices to balance cost, performance and environmental impact. Many mix refurbished and new across the same setup, upgrading phones through trade-in programmes while opting for refurbished accessories or study tools.

Premium brands benefit from this behaviour. Trade-in schemes and certified refurbished programmes create accessible entry points for students who aspire to high-quality products but are managing tight budgets. Clear communication, transparent warranties and flexible financing help students feel confident in what they're choosing.



**32%** UK consumers would purchase refurbished items because it's better for the environment



**70%–90%** of a Smartphones lifecycle carbon footprint is in the manufacturing



**25%** of all UK mobile phones sold in 2024 were refurbished

Sources: YouGov UK <sup>[13]</sup>, Carbon Trust <sup>[14]</sup>, The Guardian <sup>[15]</sup>

Environmental literacy is rising too. The UK is the world's second-largest producer of e-waste, yet households still store over 880 million unused electrical items containing nearly £1 billion in recoverable precious metals <sup>[16]</sup>. Students are acutely aware of that contradiction and are drawn to brands that help close the loop through repair services, recycling and take-back initiatives.

Durability and responsibility now define good design. Devices that last, are easy to repair and carry credible sustainability credentials are seen as progressive choices. For brands, showing that quality and responsibility can work together creates long-term impact during the years when habits and loyalties are first formed.

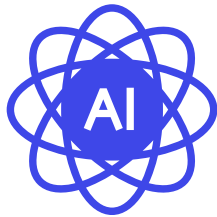


**54%** of students research brand values before purchasing

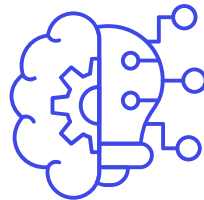
Source: Native Student Life Report 2025 <sup>[17]</sup>

# From AI to Analogue: How Gen Z Create

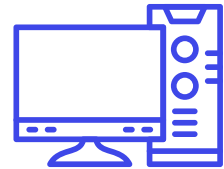
Artificial intelligence is changing how students study, plan and create. It has become part of everyday learning, used to structure research, refine ideas and manage time. This shift has raised expectations of what technology should deliver. Devices are chosen for their ability to keep up, process efficiently and integrate seamlessly with the tools students rely on. Students value technology that supports clearer thinking and more original expression, viewing AI as a partner that enhances focus rather than a replacement for creativity.



**88%** of undergraduates have used AI tools for assessments



**64%** of Gen Z believe AI will improve how they work and learn



**60%** of PCs shipped will be AI capable by 2027

Sources: HEPI 2025 [18], Dentsu EMEA Consumer Navigator 2025 [19], Canalys 2024 [20]

Alongside this appetite for innovation, students continue to explore older technology. Film cameras, record players and projectors have moved from nostalgia to lasting creative choices, offering a slower, more tactile way to capture moments or express individuality. AI and analogue habits sit comfortably side by side. Students move between formats depending on what the moment demands, choosing the tools that best help them connect ideas, document experiences or feel more grounded.



**62% of 18-24s have bought or used older tech such as film cameras or record players in the past year**

Source: The Guardian Aug 2024 [21]



**In 2023 Taylor Swift was responsible for 7% of all vinyl sales in the US**

Source: Forbes [22]

These behaviours reflect a broader instinct for creativity, authenticity and balance. Students are as comfortable with high-performance digital tools as they are with heritage formats when both enrich their lives and support how they want to create, share and remember.

## Always on: Audio & Wearables as Routine

Audio and wearable technology are part of how students navigate and personalise their day. From wireless headphones to smartwatches and fitness trackers, these devices support how students move, focus and connect. They are the closest companions to the phone, always within reach and in constant use.

High-quality audio experiences also matter in shared accommodation. Compact speakers, room-filling sound systems and portable audio products help students create atmosphere in communal spaces. Brands that balance portability, clarity and design are naturally part of social and study life.

Headphones are the second most frequently purchased tech product amongst Gen Z, after laptops.<sup>[23]</sup> They create privacy in shared spaces and provide moments of calm between lectures. For many students, audio has become an anchor for concentration and wellbeing. Music, podcasts and audiobooks are used not only for entertainment but as tools to manage energy, stress and focus.

Wearables tell a similar story. Adoption continues to rise, with more than one in two Gen Z consumers globally now owning a smartwatch or fitness tracker. Among students, these devices have moved beyond fitness into wellbeing, productivity and personal expression. The ability to monitor sleep, track mood and customise design has made them both functional and reflective of identity.



52% of Gen Z consumers globally own a smartwatch or fitness tracker



68% of Gen Z use headphones daily for focus or relaxation



74% of students say music helps them manage stress and maintain balance

Sources: Deloitte 2024 [24], Ofcom 2025 [25], UNiDAYS 2025 [26]

Together, audio and wearables link movement, focus and self-care into one connected flow that adapts to the moment. This quiet integration has redefined how students expect technology to behave: intuitive, unobtrusive and responsive.

For brands, this is a space built on trust and closeness. Students wear or listen to these products for hours each day, forming habits and allegiances that last. Comfort, quality and emotional relevance are as important as innovation. Brands that design with empathy as well as precision can build presence that feels genuinely personal.

# Student Year, Market Moments

Each point in the academic year brings new motivations and spending triggers, giving brands natural opportunities to connect when relevance is highest.



## Back to Uni:

Device setup peaks as students prepare for the academic year. Laptop upgrades, headphone purchases and accessory bundles dominate, driven by student-essential promotions and trade-in offers that convert intent into action.

## Nov: Pre-Peak Discovery

Students begin browsing for seasonal deals and adding tech to wish-lists ahead of Black Friday. Early brand visibility builds familiarity before Cyber Week spending surges. Awareness is key to driving consideration at this critical time.



## Cyber Week and Christmas Gifting

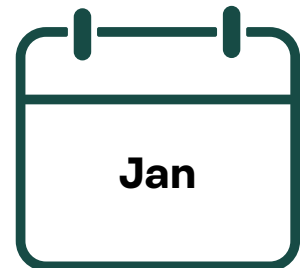
A high-intent shopping period where discounts meet demand. UK online spend across Black Friday to Cyber Monday 2024 reached £3.63 billion (+5.2% YOY), including £1.12 billion on Black Friday alone. Tech remains one of the strongest categories for student purchase and gifting.

Source: Reuters quoting Adobe Analytics Dec24 [27]

## New Year Sales and Second Term Setup

January sales sustain momentum as retailers clear post-Christmas stock. Students return with new routines, gift money and fresh loan payments (c. £3.2bn distributed to 1.3m students at the start of 2025). It's a natural point for device upgrades, accessories and study or wellbeing tech.

Source: UK Government, Student Loans Company [28]



## Mid-Year Refresh

Study workloads increase and focus turns to performance. Accessories, peripherals and productivity tools see steady demand as students look to maintain reliability through spring.

## Exam and Transition Period:

Focus tools, ergonomic accessories and dependable devices rise in importance as exams approach. Messaging around concentration, comfort and calm resonates, as students manage pressure and prepare for summer routines, placements or life beyond campus.





## Where and How They Shop

For student Gen Z, tech shopping blends discovery with real-world reassurance. Research often starts on TikTok, Reddit or YouTube before moving to brand or retailer sites, and ends with in-store, online or app purchase.

New independence and limited budgets make students deliberate shoppers. They compare prices, read reviews and seek transparency around value, service and sustainability, not just discounts.



**62%** of UK consumers buy tech products through brand or retailer websites



**54%** of Gen Z prefer a mix of in-store and online shopping for tech purchases



**61%** of Gen Z spend longer researching purchases than any other generation

Sources: Dentsu EMEA Consumer Navigator Q1 2025 [29], UNiDAYS Q4 2024 Student Insight Report [30], Microsoft & Suzy Inc, Decoding the Modern Consumer Playbook [31]

Marketplaces such as Amazon, brand stores like Apple and Samsung, and high-street names including Currys and Argos all play defined roles. Students move fluidly between them, pairing the convenience of major retailers with the reassurance of direct-to-consumer channels for repairs, trade-ins, warranties and trying products in person.

Peer influence and incentives drive conversion. Over half act on recommendations from friends or creators, and most use discount codes or student bundles that signal fairness as well as value. Search and word-of-mouth play a greater role compared to older generations, who lean heavily on past brand experience and in-store cues. Only a small share of students cite previous experience as decisive compared with Millennials, Gen X and Boomers, indicating that long-term loyalty is there for the taking. [32]

Finance tools also shape behaviour. Buy Now Pay Later has become common for high-ticket tech, while trade-in and refurbished programmes are viewed as smart, sustainable choices.



**55%** of students act on peer recommendations



**92%** of students regularly use discount codes



**20%** of UK adults use BNPL, higher amongst students

Sources: Nativefm Student Life Report 2025/26 [33], UNiDAYS 2025 [34], FCA 2025 [35]

The opportunity lies in connecting digital curiosity with physical reassurance; priming intent on campus, driving action online, and reinforcing trust at the point of purchase

## Where Lifelong Tech Habits Begin

University is where the buying behaviour of future high earners is shaped. These years influence not only what students use today, but what they will continue to choose long after graduation.

The student years are a period of accelerated discovery. Young adults move from shared family decisions to full autonomy, often buying high-value devices independently for the first time. This shift in ownership is profound. It marks the moment when personal preferences override inherited ones, and where brands compete not for a single-sale, but for the beginning of a long-term relationship.

Psychology plays a role here. Research consistently shows that habit formation strengthens during late adolescence and early adulthood, when the brain regions responsible for long-term planning, identity and impulse control are still developing. Students explore, compare and test options more actively during this stage than at any other time in their lives. Their choices are shaped by curiosity, practicality and aspiration, and once established, these patterns are remarkably stable.



**81%** of Freshers are open to experimenting with new brands at University



**+77%** of students say they'll stay loyal if they have a positive early experience with a brand



**+66%** of students don't think brands understand what students need

Sources: Native Student Life Report 2024 [36], Ernst & Young 2023, EY Gen Z Segmentation Study [37], Native Student Life Report 2025 [38]

Social influence accelerates this. Students live, study and socialise in tight-knit groups. They see what their peers use every day, often sharing devices, comparing features and learning through demonstration rather than advertising. Research shows students are significantly more influenced by peer behaviour than other generations, with recommendations from friends carrying substantial weight in decision-making. These shared environments create clusters of behaviour where one brand becomes the default simply by being visible, trusted or familiar in the group.

**73%** of students are more likely to trust a brand after regular campus exposure

**68%** of students seek peer recommendations over influencers

Sources: Native Student Life Report 2025 [39, 40]

The emotional backdrop of university strengthens these bonds even further. Many students describe their time on campus as one of the most formative periods of their life. It is where they build independence, grow in confidence and form enduring relationships. Technology is woven into every part of that journey. The laptop that carried them through deadlines, the headphones that anchored their focus, or the speaker that soundtracked nights with friends become part of a nostalgic, positive memory set. These associations matter. Loyalty research shows that emotionally charged experiences create stronger, longer-lasting preferences than rational ones. When students encounter a brand in places they trust, and when the message aligns naturally with what they need in that moment, it becomes part of the environment they remember as supportive and familiar. Consistent presence in these everyday touchpoints builds recognition, confidence and perceived reliability, all of which strengthen long-term loyalty.



77% of students agree that brand interactions are memorable on campus



70% of students discover new brands in stressful/problem solving moments



85% of students value brands that authentically understand them

Sources: Native Student Life Report 2025 [41, 42, 43]

University is rarely when students get their first phone, but it is often the first time they choose and pay for a major update themselves. That moment of independent decision making carries real weight. A device chosen at this stage often shapes what they buy next. Students who commit to an iPhone are more likely to add AirPods, Apple Watches or a MacBook later on. Those who opt for Samsung often build on it with Galaxy tablets or Buds. A Dyson hair tool can be an entry point into the brand's household appliances when setting up their first home. A Sonos speaker used in shared spaces can influence future audio purchases. Early choices become the reference points students return to as their needs and budgets grow.

These preferences take hold quickly. Behaviourally, people arrive at a purchase moment already leaning towards one or two brands they trust, and the high ticket price of consumer electronics makes this tendency especially strong. Much of the decision is shaped long before active shopping begins. The seeds sewn at university continue to grow long after graduation.

**81% of Consumer Electronics sales purchases are people choosing brands they're already biased towards before they started shopping**

**Only 19% of consumer electronics decision making is genuinely up for grabs**

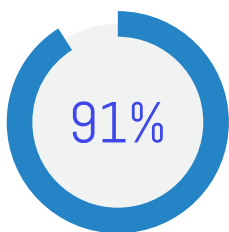
Sources: WPPMedia: How Humans Decide [44]

# Meet Eighteen24, Specialists in Student Engagement

Consumer electronics are woven into every part of student life. Devices support how young adults study, create and stay connected, but they also shape identity, confidence and independence. University is the moment when students make high-value tech decisions for themselves, forming habits and loyalties that last long after graduation.

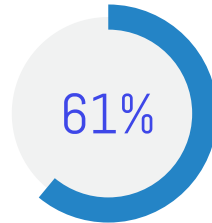
Eighteen24 helps brands show up with relevance at this formative stage. We operate the UK's largest DOOH network across Students' Unions, reaching over 70% of the nation's 3 million students through premium full-motion screens in trusted, high-dwell spaces. Our placements act as a modern, unavoidable campus noticeboard that drives attention and action in ways social feeds increasingly cannot.

## Eighteen24 screens are the ultimate Gen Z Student Noticeboard:



### Student Noticeboard:

91% agree E24 screens are useful for staying informed



### Driving WOM

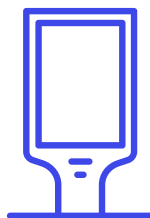
61% have discussed something seen on the E24 screens with a friend or course mate

Source: Eighteen24 Student Survey 2025 (n=50) [45]

## OOH is noticed, makes other media work harder and drives response:



77% of students tune out of social media advertising, highlighting digital fatigue



63% higher likelihood of online action when OOH is paired with mobile



47% uplift in sales activation effects (vs non-OOH users)

Sources: native.fm Student Life Report 2025/26 [46], Posterscope OOH Effectiveness Meta-Analysis, [47] Field and Rapport, Standing on the Shoulders of Giants, 2018 [48]

## OOH builds trust and confidence – key for long-term brand building:

**+17%**

More likely to feel confident in a brand using OOH

**+15%**

More likely to feel it's a successful brand if using OOH

**+14%**

More likely to trust the brand if using OOH

Sources: Work Research & The Moment of Trust, Clear Channel & JCDecaux [49]

# Why E24 Delivers Standout for Consumer Electronics Brands

Cutting through with students requires more than digital noise. Our network combines cultural visibility, high trust and real-world relevance to help consumer electronics brands engage students in the moments where tech needs, study cycles and purchase intent align.



## UNMATCHED REACH IN TRUSTED SPACES

Eighteen24 reaches over 70% of UK students through premium full-motion D6 screens inside Students' Unions. These high-dwell, high-attention environments ensure quality tech brands are seen, remembered and discussed



## A PREMIUM CHANNEL THAT BUILDS TRUST

For high-ticket items, credibility matters. Campus DOOH signals quality, confidence and reassurance in a way that stands apart from cluttered social feeds. Students trust what they see in shared, authentic environments



## INSTANT PATHS TO DIGITAL ACTION

With most tech purchasing now online, our screens bridge inspiration and action. QR offers, trade-in prompts and student bundles, surfaced in high-dwell environments convert interest quickly, matching how students research and buy



## 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. Consumer electronics accompany students through every part of university life, and our screens place brands inside the real moments of study, connection and routine where preferences naturally develop.

### 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 Essential

Show how your products support study, focus, creativity and wellbeing across the rhythms of student life



### Make it Social

Connect brand stories to shared moments in the places where students collaborate, relax and spark conversation



### Make it Seamless

Use full-motion DOOH and smart mobile prompts to move students smoothly from awareness to action

## Don't Miss the Moment to be chosen as the tech students trust first

Students make key decisions about the devices and ecosystems they build during university, often setting preferences that last for years. This is the point where visibility, reassurance and relevance have the greatest impact.

**Eighteen24 puts consumer electronics brands at the centre of student life, where real-world presence meets peer influence and daily routines shape long-term choice.**

**Talk to us about how your brand can become their next upgrade:**  
[sales@eighteen24.com](mailto:sales@eighteen24.com)



Follow us on LinkedIn and Instagram for regular insights

**Eighteen<sup>24</sup>**

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