

FOOD DELIVERY & MEAL SERVICES

Feeding convenience culture:
where appetite meets
opportunity in the student
market

An Eighteen24 White Paper · Nov 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A preview of how UK students order in, what drives the basket, and where brands earn the order.

The full paper sets out the scale of the food delivery, meal kit and rapid grocery opportunity on campus, the behaviours that drive student frequency and spend, and how brands can build presence at the moments hunger hits. This summary gives you the headlines.

FOR THE FULL PAPER

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INSIDE THIS SUMMARY

- Section guide
- Six headline insights
- How to access the full paper

A complete guide to food delivery, meal services and the UK student audience.

The full paper covers category data, behaviour, cultural shifts and media planning implications drawn from 20+ industry sources including Lumina Intelligence, Zego, AHDB, Food Standards Agency, Deliveroo, UNiDAYS, Worldpay and Posterscope.

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This summary covers six headline insights. The full paper goes further with the three-layer category map (RTE, meal kits, rapid grocery), the academic year demand calendar, and the activation playbook for reaching 70% of UK students at the moments hunger hits.

What the data tells us.

INSIGHT 01 • THE MARKET OPPORTUNITY

A £14.8bn delivery market, almost double its 2019 level.

The UK foodservice delivery market is forecast to reach £14.8 billion in 2026, growing +2.8% year on year and continuing toward £15.8 billion by 2028. Growth is now driven by affluent young consumers and household premiumisation rather than pandemic-era frequency. The full paper breaks down each layer of the category (ready-to-eat, meal kits and rapid grocery) and what's driving demand.

£14.8bn

UK foodservice delivery market forecast for 2026

Source: Lumina Intelligence, 2026

INSIGHT 02 • STUDENTS DRIVE THE DEMAND

Delivery is students' #1 discretionary spend.

Restaurants and takeaways top the discretionary spending list for UK students, ahead of tech, fashion and mobile. 81% order takeaway or eat out at least monthly, and Deliveroo data shows student order volume growing more than 4 times faster than other customers. The full paper sets out where, when and why students convert convenience to habit.

4x

faster student order volume growth than other Deliveroo customers

Source: Deliveroo Student Report, 2024

INSIGHT 03 • DIGITAL-FIRST ORDERING

The order journey now lives in the app.

More than 80% of UK food delivery orders are placed through mobile apps. Domino's reports over 90% of sales are now digital, with three-quarters of online orders placed in-app. App-led UX, saved details, quick reorders and digital wallets have shortened the path from inspiration to purchase. The full paper sets out how brand apps and aggregators are converging on the same ground.

80%+

of UK food delivery orders placed through mobile apps

Source: Zego UK Food Delivery Statistics, 2025

From craving to conversion.

INSIGHT 04 • DISCOVERY IS SOCIAL

Cravings start on TikTok and end at the doorstep.

55% of Gen Z use TikTok for food information and 70% use social media for food inspiration. Trends move from feed to fork at speed, often amplified by group chats and shared houses where one “order coordinator” sets the choice for everyone. The full paper sets out how social discovery feeds platform decisions.

55%

of Gen Z use TikTok for food information

Source: AHDB, Consumer Insight: The role of social media on Gen Z views on food. 2024.

INSIGHT 05 • VALUE AT THE MOMENT OF CHOICE

Promotions tip the order.

Students are financially squeezed but delivery stays in the basket. Offers are what move browsers to buyers. 92% of Gen Z students regularly use discount codes, and 41% of student orders on Deliveroo include a promotion. Subscriptions are the next layer of value, removing delivery fees and turning occasional orders into routine ones. The full paper sets out how brands make value unmistakable at the point of choice.

92%

of Gen Z students regularly use discount codes

Source: UNiDAYS Back to Campus Report

INSIGHT 06 • THE CONTEXT MULTIPLIER

Public screens spark private orders.

Food delivery already runs on context with operators optimising by hour, weather and location. Dynamic DOOH brings that same responsiveness to the public screen, and when public and personal reinforce each other, action follows. Posterscope analysis of 50+ campaigns found OOH exposure makes consumers 63% more likely to take brand action online. The full paper sets out why visibility in trusted, high-dwell campus spaces is what turns appetite into orders.

63%

more likely to take brand action online when exposed to OOH

Source: Posterscope / WARC, 2015–2020

GET THE FULL PAPER

Ready for the full picture?

We share the full white paper directly with brands, agencies and media planners working in this category. It's a short conversation and we'll send the complete report straight back to you.

Email us for the full paper.

Tell us a bit about your brand or planning brief and we'll send the complete Food Delivery and Meal Services white paper, plus answer any questions you have about reaching the UK student audience.

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Already chatting with someone at Eighteen24?
Reply to their last email and ask for the full Food Delivery & Meal Services paper.

Curated research

Sourced from 20+ industry references including Lumina Intelligence, Zego, AHDB, Food Standards Agency, Deliveroo and UNiDAYS.

Built for planners

Behavioural frameworks, brand case studies and the academic year demand calendar structured for use in briefs and recommendations.

Demand-mapped

Maps the dayparts, seasonal surges and cultural moments, from late night peaks to Freshers and Halloween, that define when students order.

The UK's largest student DOOH network

Over 400 premium full-motion D6 screens placed inside Students' Unions across 130+ campuses and 90+ universities, including 21 of the top 25. Positioned in cafes, study areas, gyms, social spaces and walkways where dwell time is highest.

400+

SCREENS

90+

UNIVERSITIES

2M

STUDENTS
REACHED
WEEKLY

116M

IMPRESSIONS
PER FORTNIGHT

Our formula for effective Gen Z engagement

Be where they
are

Be where they
care

Be where they
share

Be where they
see you

Don't miss the moment to feed future loyalty.

University is a golden window for food delivery, meal kit and rapid grocery brands. These are the years when habits form, platforms gain share, and expectations of convenience, value and variety rise quickly.

What students choose now defines the market tomorrow.

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