Introduction

I’m delighted to introduce UCAS Media’s student lifestyle report for 2018 – a single snapshot of students’ views on everything from buying tech, to booking travel, and the influences of parents and others on key product and service purchase decisions.

UCAS Media recognises the importance of understanding the whole student, and what it means to them to start university or college. For any brand wanting to engage with a new student, being able to align to their decision-making process during what is often a significant period of change in their lives, is what defines success and delivers results.

To get advice on how to refocus your marketing strategy and reach our unique audience, get in touch with one of our team.

Sander Kristel
Executive Director – UCAS Media

Methodology

Surveys were sent to students currently in their first year of university or college. The surveys were split by sector – retail, media and entertainment, finance, technology, and travel and transport. Over 11,500 students completed the surveys in total.

Before we started our calculations, we adjusted for imbalances in response rates. For example, we know older females are more likely to respond than younger men. Survey responses have been weighted to correct this imbalance.

Percentage increases or differences refer to percentage point differences.
The iPhone remained the most popular smartphone brand owned by students in 2017. Two thirds of students own one—an increase of 19% since 2016.

The popularity of Snapchat and Instagram has remained steady over the last three years. 73% of students used both sites according to our most recent survey, with 20% (Snapchat) and 23% (Instagram) increases since 2015. This puts them only 10% behind Facebook.

Netflix is the most popular entertainment service, with 72% of students using it, more than double 2016 figures. For the first time, the amount spent on music, video, and games (£7.2bn) surpassed expenditure on books, magazines, and newspapers (£7.1bn).*

Pay as you go mobile phone contracts have almost halved since 2016, to 12%. Overseas students were most likely to use pay as you go (26% in 2017), and were more than twice as likely to than students from the UK.

Student interest in social site Tumblr has continued to decline—only 11% of students now say they use it regularly.

Although 62% still open a student bank account in branch, 2017 saw a 10% increase in accounts being opened online.

Although Facebook remains the most popular social media site (83% of students currently use it), there was a slight decline in users in 2017.

* Entertainment Retailers Association
Students are comfortable with advertising, and tell us it helped their decision-making. But they felt most positive about brands when offers were personalised to them, and understood what they were interested in. A third also appreciate an obviously well thought out message.

Brand loyalty was most prevalent for tech items. However, 50% of students either currently use more than one brand, or were likely to use different brands in the near future, meaning there is still a considerable market opportunity here. Fashion brands used by students varied the most – 80% either regularly use more than one brand already, or were likely to do so over the next 12 months.

Likelihood of students using different brands for the same item (where they don’t already):

- **Supermarkets**: 34%
  - Tesco was the most popular supermarket across all domiciles, except for the West Midlands, where Aldi was most popular, but only just!
- **Fashion**: 29%
  - 51% of students said they already use more than one fashion brand. Despite male students spending more than females on clothes during freshers’ week, significantly more female students said they liked to go shopping in their spare time.
- **Health and beauty**: 29%
  - 69% of students said they liked receiving free samples in the post, providing an opportunity to promote new products, and introduce your brand.
- **Homeware**: 29%
  - Students spent three times as much on homeware during freshers’ week than they do during a typical week at uni or college.
- **Sportswear**: 28%
  - This group will not only include students studying sports science or planning to keep fit while at uni, but also the 9% planning to go on a sports trip this year.
- **Technology**: 28%
  - Apple was the most popular brand owned for smartphones, laptops, and tablets – two thirds of students now own an iPhone. If you want to engage with students about a new tech brand or item, it is vital to engage early.

Grab a student’s attention

79% of students like to be contacted via email regarding offers and products. Almost all students check their emails on their smartphones, rather than on a desktop or laptop, so ensuring your marketing messages are mobile optimised is vital. 41% check their emails as soon as they receive a notification – they were most likely to check them when they were bored (70%) and when they woke up (53%).

The next most popular channel to be contacted about offers and products was post, where 69% of students said they like to receive free samples, and offers and discounts. Despite spending a significant amount of time online and on their smartphones each day, students still preferred to purchase most items in-store, so ensure your offers can be redeemed in shops.

Students prefer to receive emails from their favourite online retailers every week, whereas every month was preferred for SMS and post.

Engaging students on their terms

Understanding brand loyalty

Students were likely to remain loyal to their favourite tech brands more than any other brands, and were most likely to already use more than one fashion brand.

Students would like to be contacted:
- 79% like to receive emails
- 57% like to receive SMS messages
- 69% like to receive free samples
- 65% like to receive offers and discounts

Students are likely to remain loyal to their favourite:
- Tech brands: 28%
  - Apple was the most popular brand owned for smartphones, laptops, and tablets – two thirds of students now own an iPhone. If you want to engage with students about a new tech brand or item, it is vital to engage early.
- Fashion brands: 28%
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Christmas shopping
Female students were more likely to shop a month earlier for Christmas presents than their male counterparts, in November. They were also likely to spend £42 more in total, with an average spend of £188.

Students open bank accounts
32% of students opened their accounts in September, and 31% in August. 39% chose their bank because they were offered an incentive, and the amount of overdraft was also important to them.

January sales
Almost three quarters of students said they’d shop during the January sales – female students being 13% more likely to do so than male students.

Students leave school and start exam season
UCAS application deadline for most undergraduate courses
UCAS Extra starts
Students start their UCAS application
SQA results day
A level results day
Black Friday and Cyber Monday
53% said they’d shop during the Black Friday sales, with 41% saying they’d also shop during Cyber Monday. Female students were more likely to shop during Black Friday, whereas males preferred to shop during the following Monday.

Students buy contents insurance
38% of students who took out contents insurance for university did so in September. The most popular provider was Endsleigh.

Summer holiday plans made
57% of students planned to go on holiday during the summer break, booking their holidays two to six months prior to travelling.

Students bought new tablets
Most students who bought a tablet specifically for uni, both researched and purchased their new tech prior to May. The most popular tablet purchased was an iPad.

Students leave school
Students planned to travel home the most between each term / semester.

Students start their UCAS application
The student journey
Feb
Mar
Apr
May
Jun
Jul
Aug
Sep
Oct
Nov
Dec
Jan
Students spent more than double in freshers’ week compared to a typical week at university. Clothes and nights out are a high priority throughout uni, whereas books and homeware were purchased early on. Perhaps surprisingly, students spent more on clothes and books than they did on nights out and alcohol.

The most significant differences in spend, however, were between university regions. Students studying in London spent around 50% more on average than those studying in the south west and Wales during a typical week at uni. During freshers’ week, it was those studying in the East Midlands who spent the most on nights out.

Budget breakdown – understanding student spend

Students spent very differently during freshers’ week – particularly on clothes. Male students spent £89, while female students spent £59. However, where 68% of females said they liked to shop in their spare time, only 38% of males did.

London students had the largest budget for uni, spending an average of £206 each week. Students in the south west spent the least, at £135.

Only three uni regions spent more than the average – London, the East Midlands, and the West Midlands.

Top fact:
65% of a student’s budget is spent each week on groceries, entertainment, and eating out. To get your share, build your brand presence early, before students start university.
What influences spending?

Top three influential factors

Although the price is an influencer, there are other factors to consider that encourage students to choose specific brands over others. For mobile phones, battery life and features were more important, whereas for music apps and festivals, students were more interested in the artists and ability to listen offline. For gap year students, an easy to use booking system was key.

Top fact:
Students tell us they are influenced by price when buying tech – but on average, they will spend £740 on a new laptop because they want value for money.
Female students were more reliant on their parents paying for all university-related items and travel than male students were. Parents were most likely to pay for students’ mobile phones, and least likely to pay for holidays. For recommendations on products, students were more influenced by how much they cost, whereas for financial advice, the majority turned to parents or other family members.

The power of parental influence

Students rely on parents to cover the cost of many essentials...

- **52%** buy a mobile phone
  - 46% bought their phones themselves, and for a further 3%, someone else paid.

- **33%** pay for the freshers’ week grocery shop
  - During freshers’ week, 28% paid for an initial large grocery shop themselves, and for 11%, both the student and someone else paid. 14% preferred to shop little and often, and for 12%, food was either included in their accommodation or they lived at home.

- **25%** buy travel tickets home from uni
  - The majority (73%) said they usually buy their travel tickets themselves.

- **21%** buy a laptop or PC for uni
  - 27% of students paid for their new laptop themselves, and for 3%, someone else paid. 19% were considering buying a new laptop but hadn’t yet, and 29% kept their current one.

- **19%** pay for gap years
  - Low cost was one of the most influential factors when students chose which gap year organisation to book with, presumably because 78% of students paid for their trip themselves.

- **17%** pay for holidays
  - 28% of holidays (planned for this year) would be paid for by a combination of both students and parents, and 53% said they’d be paying themselves.

...and for advice and guidance

- **83%** were advised on financial management
  - Followed by friends at 52%, and student support advisers at uni or college (26%).

- **39%** found out about their tech insurance providers from their parents
  - The most popular response was “it was recommended to me”.

- **14%** chose the same bank account as their parents
  - But again, additional students did so because of a recommendation (17%), which may also have been parents or family members.

- **12%** use the same supermarket
  - Low prices influenced students the most. But loyalty rewards, fast checkouts, home delivery costs and available times (students preferred to shop in store), and click and collect service availability all came below parent advocacy.

- **11%** were recommended their laptop or PC
  - They were more influential than in-store staff and free/reduced accessories and entertainment services (probably because they already subscribe to an entertainment service – only 10% weren’t subscribed).

- **7%** were recommended a mobile phone
  - When buying a phone, students relied more on parents than in-store staff, incentives (e.g. O2 priority), and SIM only deals. Most influential to them, however, were battery life and features.

Top fact:
Parents remain a key influencer – supporting students with many of the practical aspects of student life.
Cost was the most influential factor for all students when choosing transport – it was most important to students originally domiciled in the south west and north east. Students from the north west were least influenced by the costs, but most influenced by ease of travel (e.g. location of stops).

### When do students travel?

40% of students were accepted at a university or college within 25 miles of where they lived when they applied. But of those who chose to both study and live further away from home, 33% of students travelled home every week or more, and a further 55% went home at some point during the university year.

Use of transport varies when travelling to and from uni, or while at university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travelling to and around uni</th>
<th>Walking</th>
<th>Car</th>
<th>Train</th>
<th>Bus</th>
<th>Tube</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travelling home from uni</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Paying for travel?

Trainline (69%), National Rail (30%), and National Express (24%) are the first choices for buying tickets, with many also owning a travel card. But it’s often parents who pay for the ticket – with 25% saying their parents cover the cost.

54% of students own a travel card, with the market dominated by a single brand, and the majority (51%) buy tickets online. A further 27% of students purchase their tickets at the station.

### Travel card ownership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel card ownership</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16–25 Railcard</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+ Student Oyster photocard</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Express coachcard</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stagecoach unirider</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Top fact:

Travel features heavily in student life, with 44% travelling more frequently because they have a discount card.
With tuition fees and living costs for those living away from home, many would think students wouldn’t be able to afford a holiday while at uni – yet 73% were planning on taking a break during the following year. Some 17% would ask their parents for help to pay, and 28% would be a combination of themselves and a parent paying.

### Holidays planned this year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>City break</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach break</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation / pool break</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backpacking</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staycation (in the UK)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering / working abroad</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports / adventure</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Holiday budgets and who will be paying?

Students predicted they’d spend an average of £909 on holidays this year.

While over half (53%) said they’d be paying for their holidays themselves, 17% said they’d rely on their parents to pay, and 28% said it would be a combination of themselves and their parents.

### Booking holidays

The most popular time to book holidays (for all of the above) was between two and six months prior to travel.

Students were unlikely to book last minute holidays, as only 8% said they’d book within two weeks of travel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the summer break</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During weekends / short breaks</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the spring break</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the winter break</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top fact: 73% of students are planning a holiday – with an average £909 predicted spend.
The experience of a lifetime

28% of students took a year out (or more) between finishing school and starting uni or college, and 6% of these went travelling during that time. The majority (78%) of students paid for their travels themselves, with a smaller proportion (19%) relying on parents to pay. Almost all students (93%) went shopping specifically for their travels, with more buying clothes/shoes than insurance or luggage.

Top destinations and length of stay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East Asia</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Their chosen destination was weighted towards Europe, with most taking an extended period to explore:

- Two weeks or less: 14%
- Two weeks to three months: 42%
- Three to six months: 21%
- Six months to one year: 16%
- More than a year: 7%

The top reasons for travel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet new people</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break from education</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The top travel organisations helping turn trips into reality were STA Travel (19%) and gapyear.com (4%). These were largely chosen due to recommendation, rather than cost.

Travel budget

- Travel and accommodation: £1,963
- Pre-travel purchases: £314
- Travel insurance: £219

Top five pre-travel purchases:

- Clothes: 66%
- Insurance: 59%
- Toiletries: 56%
- Camera: 32%
- Luggage: 30%

Top fact:

Gap years are planned early, and largely by students themselves. So, travel companies should ensure their message is heard well before students leave school.
Changing behaviours across the country

By student domicile

Scotland
Students from Scotland were the most likely to purchase a new laptop or PC specifically for uni – 58% purchased one in 2017.

North East
Students from the North East were the most likely to spend over five hours a day on social media.

Yorkshire
These students were the most reliant on Facebook – 35% chose it as their preferred channel.

East Midlands
Students from the East Midlands were the only group who chose Snapchat as their preferred social media – most other students picked Facebook.

East of England
Only 0.4% of students from this region shopped for groceries every day. They were 21 times less likely to do so than students from London!

London
Students from London don’t like to wait around! Journey time was more important to these students than in any other region.

South East
Students from the South East were most reliant on their parents for their freshers’ week grocery shop – 40% had an initial large grocery shop bought for them by their parents.

Overseas
Overseas students were the least likely to rely on parents to pay for an initial large grocery shop during freshers’ week.

Top fact:
Students from the East Midlands chose Snapchat as their preferred social media, whereas students from Yorkshire were most reliant on Facebook.

By student domicile

Northern Ireland
Students from Northern Ireland were the least likely to check their emails as soon as they get a notification, although they’ll still typically check them two to five times a day.

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Tech trends

With the help of a parent or relative, students bought a new laptop or PC. They were most engaged with their mobile phones, two thirds of which were iPhones. Students preferred to purchase their phones in store directly from the network shops, whereas laptops, PCs, and tablets were mostly bought from electronic retailers (but still in store).

Wearable tech ownership has seen a significant uplift in the last year. In 2016, only 6% of students owned a Fitbit, whereas 12 months on, almost a third own some sort of fitness tracker.

When did students buy their tech?

**Smartphones**

Most students waited to upgrade their smartphones, and since 67% own an iPhone, perhaps they were waiting for the new iPhone 8 to be released.

Battery life was the most important factor to 56% of students when purchasing a new phone, followed closely by features (50%), and tariff/price (48%). Students weren’t influenced by an incentive – only 5% thought this was important. Over half (52%) relied on parents to do so instead.

The most popular network among students was EE, it’s been top for the past three years.

**Laptops and PCs**

May or earlier was when most research a new laptop or PC for uni, but most made their purchase after they were accepted in September.

51% of students bought a new laptop or PC specifically for uni, and 19% were considering upgrading. Students spent an average of £740, most of which were from Apple (29%) or HP (24%). A third of these students bought their laptop from Currys / PC World, with 64% stating that price was the most important factor.

**Tablets**

Most students both researched and purchased their new tablet months before starting uni, probably because studying isn’t the main use. Most use for TV/video (45%) and to play games (43%).

Students spent an average of £316 on their new tablets, and 65% were from Apple.

### The devices they own...

- **Smartphone**: 99%
- **Laptop**: 98%
- **Tablet**: 47%

### ...and their average spend

- **Smartphone**: £26 (monthly contract)
- **Laptop**: £740
- **Tablet**: £316

### How do they use their tech?

Average daily device time varies.

- **Smartphone**: 5h 50m
- **Laptop**: 3h 35m
- **Tablet**: 3h 52m
- **Tablet**: 2h 36m

### Preferred device for buying non-food items

Students **preferred to shop in store** for all non-food items except basics and study materials. The second preference to purchase items was on a laptop or PC. Students were more likely to shop on a smartphone for gifts than any other item, whereas more books were purchased on a tablet.

Top fact:

Tech for uni is often researched well before exam season, with parents a major influence in the purchasing process.
A social connection

Year-on-year trends
For the second year running, Snapchat and Instagram grew their student base more than any other social media sites. Facebook retained the top spot, but was one of the only sites to lose market share; however, they were still chosen over others when students were asked to pick just one social media site.

Other sites used by students include Tinder, which saw a slight increase in 2017 to bring it in line with Google+, and Reddit, with 9% of student users overall. Reddit proved significantly more popular with male students – 18% used it regularly, compared to only 3% of female students. A site not mentioned, but second most popular if compared with social media, was YouTube, where 80% of students said they used the site on a regular basis.

Facebook remains the most popular site overall, with students still choosing it as the site they’d use over others.

Instagram and Snapchat have been the fastest growing over the past three years, up to 20%.

WhatsApp growth among students almost halted in 2017. London-based students chose the messaging app when asked to pick which social media site they would use, if only one could be chosen.

Student usage of Twitter has remained relatively consistent over recent years. 18 and 19 year olds used it the most (42%), whereas only 11% of 17 year olds were members.

How is social media being used?

1st 2nd 3rd
Chatting to friends/family
Discovering more about a brand
Finding offers
Researching/reviewing new products
Sharing photos or videos
Using video chat

Can students survive without it?
Social media is an essential component of students’ lives – 100% of students said they use some form of social media, and the average student spends 4h 39m on it each day. Students also said they spend more time socialising online (84%) than in person (83%). Watching TV and films (85%) was a preferred activity.

Who spends the most time socialising online?

Top fact:
Students use social channels for different purposes, using Instagram for brand discovery and Facebook for offers. Aligning your message with their use is critical to success.
Why UCAS Media?

If you need a partner that can cut through the noise to reach the right students with your acquisition campaigns, speak to UCAS Media. Targeted, early access to the UK’s verified student audience, months before anyone else, means we give your brand the edge.

Trusted by students and their advisers, 700k applicants use UCAS every year to progress to higher education. That puts UCAS Media in the perfect position to support brands that want to help students, with products and services that will make their next step a confident one.

UCAS Media Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of UCAS. By working with us, you’ll be directly supporting today’s and tomorrow’s students, because we gift aid our profits back to UCAS, the charity. This reduces the cost of admissions services for students and higher education providers alike.

For more information on any aspect of this report, or to find out how we can connect your brand to this important audience, please get in touch.