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Women's Perspectives in 2026: Self-perception & digital impact

Femininity today: meanings, expressions, and the inner foundations of women's confidence

Femininity is becoming less about meeting expectations and more about authentic self-definition

While all generations value attitude and self-confidence as core to femininity, Generation X slightly prioritizes physical style, whereas Millennials distinctly emphasize independence and professional success.

Additionally, Generation Z places a higher importance on the harmony between personal and family life.

To a large extent & To a very large extent %

%	All women	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X
Attitude and self-confidence	83	76	84	86
Empathy and care for others	74	73	73	76
Balance between personal and family life	72	73	71	75
Physical appearance and personal style (clothes, makeup)	72	67	72	75
Independence and professional success	66	62	68	63

Femininity today: authentic at every age, different at every stage

Across all generations, femininity is described through a mix of authenticity, inner strength, and self-confidence, rather than traditional or purely aesthetic markers. However, each generation prioritizes different traits, reflecting their life stage, and social pressures.
Gen Z defines femininity as being yourself without apology — confident, authentic, expressive, and comfortable in your own skin, rather than fitting predefined roles. For Millennials, femininity means being confident and emotionally intelligent while staying true to yourself, balancing inner and outer dimensions. Gen X views femininity as grounded, emotionally rich, and relational, shaped by responsibility, care, and lived experience rather than appearance or performance.

%	All women	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X
Naturalness	42	36	40	50
Self-confidence	41	42	41	40
Personal style and elegance	34	33	34	36
Delicacy and grace	33	27	33	36
Emotional intelligence and empathy	32	33	33	31
Caring for loved ones, family, community	31	31	28	35
Health and physical harmony	31	27	31	32
Sensuality	27	32	24	29
Gentleness	25	27	24	28
Diplomacy and tact in communication	23	19	25	21
Personal care rituals	22	20	22	23
Career and personal life balance	19	17	18	22
Independence/ autonomy	19	23	19	16
Inner strength and resilience	15	14	15	13
Maternity	14	11	14	17
Assumed vulnerability	5	7	5	3

Confidence built on personal strength and autonomy

Women generally exhibit strong self-confidence in their abilities, particularly in making decisions and overcoming life's challenges. They also feel competent in their daily professional and personal activities.

However, there is a comparatively lower, though still positive, level of agreement regarding happiness with their current physical appearance and the belief that their clothing style and makeup faithfully reflect their desires.

%	Strongly disagree & Partially disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partial agreement & Totally agree
I confidently make the decisions	4	12	84
I feel competent in my daily activities (professional or personal)	4	15	81
I am concerned with developing new skills and personal qualities	5	15	80
I am able to successfully overcome the obstacles that life throws in my way	5	15	80
I express my point of view easily, even when it is different from others	8	16	76
I am at peace with the way others perceive me, without being influenced by their opinions	7	21	72
I feel like I have full control over the decisions that influence my life	8	15	76
My clothing style and makeup are a faithful reflection of my desires	11	21	68
I'm happy with my current physical appearance	14	20	66

The foundations of confidence: what truly makes women feel secure

Education, personal achievements, mindset, life experience, and the ability to make decisions independently stand out as the strongest confidence anchors. Appearance-related factors (looks, clothes, personal care) play a secondary but still meaningful role, especially compared to social approval or comparisons with others. Overall, women's confidence is built more on competence, autonomy, and personal growth than on how they are seen by others.

Top 10

My mindset (positive attitude)	41%
Education and knowledge I have	38%
My qualities	35%
Ability to make decisions alone	35%
Personal achievements	32%
The fact that I'm happy with what I have	32%
Life experiences	30%
Family (parents, siblings, etc.)	29%
How I handle failures and criticism	29%
Life partner	28%

Social media reality check: filters, posting habits & conversation gaps

Social media's emotional impact

Gen Z is the clear outlier: they most strongly believe social media shows only best moments, are most likely to feel self-confidence drop from comparisons, and are most influenced by likes/comments.

Gen X is consistently the least affected by comparison and validation dynamics, with Millennials generally in the middle on all statements.

On social networks, people choose to display only their best moments	76%
I believe that social networks promote beauty standards that are difficult to achieve	64%
Using social media is a way for me to relax and disconnect	60%
I often feel a state of fatigue due to the large volume of information on social networks	46%
I am up to date with the latest trends on social networks	46%
Social media content motivates me to make positive changes in my lifestyle	45%
My shopping and lifestyle choices are influenced by what I see on social media	36%
I feel like my self-confidence drops when I compare myself to the people I follow online	35%
Social media is my main source of inspiration	33%
I feel a state of anxiety if I can't check my social networks, for fear of missing something important	27%
My mood is influenced by the number of likes and comments I receive on social media	26%

Filters & beauty standards

I believe that the use of filters affects the perception of what a normal physical appearance means	70%
I'm at peace with the idea that I don't always have to look "perfect" or "instagrammable" online	67%
I prefer to follow people/influencers who also show their imperfections, not just the perfect moments	64%
I think it takes courage to post images without filters or edits on social networks	51%
Exposure to edited/filtered images makes me have unrealistic expectations of my own appearance	44%
I feel a social pressure to look flawless in every picture I upload online	35%
The constant comparison with the standards on social networks frustrates me	32%
After spending time on social media, I tend to be much more critical about my physical appearance	32%

Social media photo editing behavior

Overall, the most common behavior is light/occasional improvement rather than heavy editing, while a sizeable group says they're confident posting as they are.
Gen Z stands out as the most "enhancement-oriented": they're most likely to edit/improve photos and most likely to feel insecure posting without filters.

Millennials are the middle ground, leaning toward occasional improvements but not as strongly as Gen Z. Gen X is the most authenticity-driven: they're more likely to stay natural or feel confident without editing, and they're also the most likely to not post photos of themselves.

Group	%	Statement
Filter-reliant editors	4%	I always edit my photos
Filter-reliant editors	5%	I feel insecure when I post without filters
Selective enhancers	33%	I accept my appearance, butsometimes I prefer to improve it in pictures
Authenticity strivers	23%	I always try to be natural, even if it's not always easy
Naturally confident	27%	I feel confident exactly as I am, without feeling the need to edit
I don't post photos of myself	8%	I don't post photos of myself

Topics misrepresented from women's perspective

The biggest unmet conversation is social disconnection: women feel loneliness/isolation in the digital age isn't talked about enough or is handled poorly.

Personal struggle is also under-addressed: failure (professional/personal) and the unfiltered reality of motherhood sit right behind loneliness as "not spoken about properly."

Loneliness and isolation in the digital age	31%
Managing professional or personal failure	26%
The reality of motherhood	25%
Addiction to validation and likes on social networks	23%
The pressure to always look young	22%
Women's and men's pay gaps	21%
Decision not to follow the traditional family	21%
Effort to organize all aspects of family life and work	21%
The pressure to be skinny	20%
Financial independence	19%
Menopause and hormonal changes in adulthood	19%
None of the above	4%

Where women turn for reliable information

%	Family/ Friends	Users groups/ Reviews (Communities)	Influencers / Content Creators	Celebrities / Public figures	Experts in the field	Official brand channels	Artificial intelligence tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Gemini)	I don't follow this topic
Makeup	15	10	15	7	32	9	4	9
Skincare	15	9	9	6	42	8	5	5
Haircare	16	9	12	7	38	7	5	6
Nutrition	16	7	8	5	45	5	5	9
Lifestyle and personal organization	28	9	11	7	24	6	7	8
Sports	14	9	13	6	36	5	6	11
Cooking	26	9	15	6	25	6	7	5
Technology	16	7	9	5	38	10	7	8
Social life/events	36	10	12	9	14	7	6	7
Travel, holidays	26	17	13	6	15	9	9	5
Female health	18	6	6	5	48	6	6	5
Financial education, financial services	16	6	6	5	46	8	6	8

Women preferences for female archetypes in advertising

%	To a large extent & To a very large extent	Neither to a small nor large extent	To a very small extent & To a small extent	I don't know
The Heart of the Home	77%	13%	7%	2%
The Effortless Beauty	75%	14%	9%	2%
The Energy Queen	73%	19%	7%	1%
The Boss Babe	65%	22%	11%	2%
The Icon	46%	28%	24%	2%

AI in advertising: between innovation and trust

Recognizing AI in visual content

87% Of women are aware of the existence of AI tools

77% Of women say they can distinguish between an AI-generated model and a real one

86% Of women have noticed AI-generated posts on social media

How confident are women in recognizing AI-generated models?

I think I can make a difference, but I'm not sure	51%
I am convinced that I can make a difference	19%
I would never have thought about this aspect	16%
I don't usually realize it	14%

Attitudes toward AI in advertising

%	Strongly disagree & Partially disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partial agreement & Totally agree
Brands should compulsorily tag any image or clip generated by artificial intelligence	9	24	67
Artificial intelligence allows brands to be more creative and tell more interesting stories	15	31	54
Ads made with artificial intelligence seem artificial and emotionless to me	12	34	54
The use of artificial intelligence makes a brand seem less authentic	15	35	50
I feel uncomfortable if I can't distinguish between a real person and one created by artificial intelligence	17	34	49
I don't mind if a model in an advertisement is generated by artificial intelligence, as long as the product presented is real	18	34	48
I have less confidence in a brand that uses AI-generated models instead of real people	15	39	46
The use of artificial intelligence in advertising is one way for brands to try to mislead consumers	14	40	46
I believe that artificial intelligence can help brands provide me with personalized product/service recommendations	16	39	45
Ads made with artificial intelligence are more visually appealing than traditional ones	22	36	41
Brands that use artificial intelligence in their ads are more innovative than others	25	40	35

Openness to AI tools in everyday use

%		All women	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X
Very reluctant & Quite reluctant %	Virtual mirror to see how I look with cosmetics/outfits	17	23	17	13
	Skin analysis (based on a photo/film)	19	16	22	14
	AI chatbot to give me recommendations or information about products/services	15	20	16	11
	Simulate what new furniture would look like in my home	13	18	13	9
Quite open & Very open %	Virtual mirror to see how I look with cosmetics/outfits	57	54	55	60
	Skin analysis (based on a photo/film)	52	61	47	57
	AI chatbot to give me recommendations or information about products/services	55	58	53	57
	Simulate what new furniture would look like in my home	64	62	62	66

Main concerns around AI-driven advertising

Lack of authenticity - I don't know what the real product looks like or on a real person	38%
Promoting unattainable beauty standards	26%
The risk of being misled - I don't realize that the model is not real	25%
I have no worries; it seems to me a normal evolution	12%

MORE INFO

- Women in advertising
- How ads portray women across industries
- Perceptions and associations of female archetypes in advertising
- Where women most often encounter stereotypical female portrayal
- Attitudes toward AI in advertising
- Acceptability of AI-generated models in ads
- Big brands vs. private labels (categories)

Ask consumer@starcomww.com for details

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