

Exploring Visual Identity and Social Influence in the Picturemarks Project

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The Picturemarks project, initially developed in collaboration with a research lab at Harvard University and supported by Getty Images, began as an exploratory digital platform for aggregating and visualizing personal image collections. Building on prior quantitative analyses—including usability testing, A/B testing, and cluster analysis, this new phase shifts toward a qualitative investigation of how individuals construct identity and interpret social influence through curated visual assemblages. This research explores how users engage with their aggregated images, particularly those drawn from social media platforms such as Instagram, and how the recontextualization of these images on a shared digital canvas affects self-perception, memory, and interpersonal communication. Through in-depth interviews, participatory design sessions, and visual ethnography, we examine user experiences with the Picturemarks interface, focusing on emotional resonance, narrative formation, and the perceived agency in visual self-representation. Preliminary observations, such as a student's astonishment at seeing 2,000 personal images, many of them selfies, reorganized on a single canvas, suggest that visual aggregation can provoke reflective self-assessment and new modes of digital storytelling. This project investigates these moments of insight, analyzing how visual patterns, repetition, and arrangement influence users' understanding of their digital identities over time. By centering user voices and interpretive practices, this study contributes to humanistic and pedagogical discussions in digital humanities, particularly around visual literacy, data ownership, and the emotional dimensions of digital archives. Findings will inform the design of more reflective, ethically grounded tools for personal data visualization in educational and creative contexts.