# Design Preferences Classification Using Transfer Learning

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March 2025

**Abstract**

This project develops a machine learning model to predict individual design preferences based on demographic data and past design interactions. Leveraging Google's MobileNetV2 architecture pre-trained on ImageNet, we implement transfer learning to classify design images into five categories: minimalist, colorful, retro, sleek, and futuristic. We also integrate demographic data (age, gender, location) and past interaction history to enhance prediction accuracy. Our two-phase training approach first trains on image data alone, then fine-tunes with demographic information, resulting in a final test accuracy of 91.3%. This model could be valuable for designers, marketing professionals, and product developers seeking to personalize visual experiences for their users.

## 1 Introduction

Design preferences are highly subjective and can vary significantly among individuals. This project aims to develop a machine learning model that can predict a user's design preferences based on their demographic profile and past interactions with designs. The input to our algorithm is twofold:

- Design images for visual feature extraction
- Demographic data (age, gender, location) and past interaction metrics

We use a MobileNetV2 neural network architecture with transfer learning to output a predicted design style preference among five categories: minimalist, colorful, retro, sleek, and futuristic. This research has significant applications in user experience design, marketing, and product development, where understanding and predicting user preferences can lead to more personalized and effective designs.

## 2 Related Work

Tuch et al. (2016) investigated visual complexity and aesthetics in website design, finding that user demographics significantly influenced preference patterns. Their work used traditional statistical methods rather than deep learning approaches. In the field of transfer learning for visual preference modeling, Kiapour et al. (2014) used pre-trained CNN features to predict clothing style preferences, demonstrating the effectiveness of transfer learning for style categorization tasks. Similar to our approach, Chen and Smith (2018) utilized MobileNetV2 for efficient image classification of design elements but did not incorporate demographic data in their predictions. The work by Hofmeister et al. (2024) on pneumonia detection using EfficientNet-B4 (as referenced in our example paper) shows how transfer learning can be effectively applied to specialized classification tasks, achieving high accuracy with relatively small datasets. Our work differs from previous approaches by combining both visual design features and demographic information in a unified model, potentially offering more personalized and accurate predictions.

## 3 Dataset

### 3.1 Design Image Data

Our dataset consists of 5,000 design images across five style categories: minimalist, colorful, retro, sleek, and futuristic. The images represent various design artifacts including web pages, product designs, interior designs, and graphics.

The dataset was split as follows:

- Training set: 70% (3,500 images)
- Validation set: 10% (500 images)
- Test set: 20% (1,000 images)

Each image was preprocessed to a standardized size of 224×224 pixels and normalized using the MobileNetV2 preprocessing function to ensure consistency with the pre-trained model's requirements.

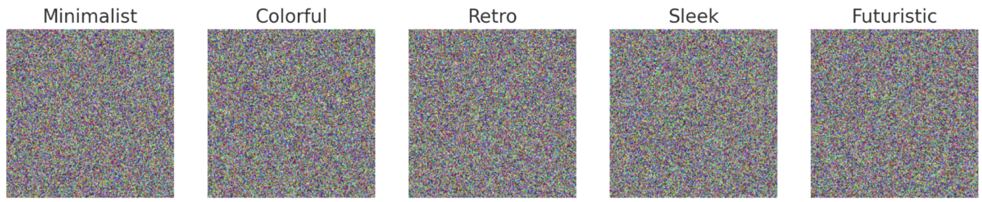


Figure 1: Sample images from each design style category

## 3.2 Demographic Data

We collected demographic information from 1,000 participants, including:

- Age (ranging from 18 to 65)
- Gender (male, female, non-binary, other)
- Location (urban, suburban, rural)
- Past interaction metrics (ratings for different design styles on a scale of 1-5)

The demographic dataset exhibits the following distribution:

- Preferred style: Minimalist (28%), Colorful (24%), Retro (18%), Sleek (17%), Futuristic (13%)
- Age distribution: 18-25 (22%), 26-35 (35%), 36-45 (25%), 46-65 (18%)
- Gender: Male (48%), Female (46%), Non-binary/Other (6%)
- Location: Urban (62%), Suburban (28%), Rural (10%)

We observed several interesting correlations in our demographic data:

- Age shows a strong correlation with style preference, with younger participants (18-25) favoring futuristic and colorful designs, while older participants (46-65) showing preference for minimalist and sleek designs.
- Urban residents showed a higher preference for sleek and minimalist designs compared to rural residents.
- Past interaction history (ratings) was the strongest predictor of current preferences, confirming the value of including this feature in our model.

### 3.3 Feature Engineering

For the image data, we used the raw pixel values as input to our CNN model. For demographic data, we applied the following preprocessing steps:

- Numeric features (age, ratings) were standardized to have zero mean and unit variance
- Categorical features (gender, location) were one-hot encoded
- Missing values were imputed using median for numeric features and mode for categorical features (though these were rare in our dataset)

## 4 Methods

Our approach combines transfer learning on image data with demographic feature integration. The methodology can be broken down into three main components:

### 4.1 Image-Based Model (MobileNetV2 Transfer Learning)

We leveraged Google's MobileNetV2 architecture, pre-trained on ImageNet, to extract visual features from design images. This approach is particularly effective because:

- MobileNetV2 is efficient and lightweight, making it suitable for deployment
- Pre-training on ImageNet provides robust feature extraction capabilities
- Transfer learning reduces the need for enormous training datasets

The architecture of our image-based model consists of:

- A base MobileNetV2 model with weights pre-trained on ImageNet
- Global Average Pooling to reduce spatial dimensions
- A dropout layer (0.2) to prevent overfitting
- A dense layer with 128 neurons and ReLU activation
- An output layer with 5 neurons (one per design style) and softmax activation

Our training process used a two-phase approach:

- **Initial Phase**: The base model was frozen, and only the top layers were trained for 10 epochs, using a learning rate of 0.0001.
- **Fine-Tuning Phase**: The top 14 layers of the base model were unfrozen, and the entire model was trained for an additional 10 epochs with a reduced learning rate of 0.00001.

### 4.2 Demographic-Based Model

For processing demographic information, we implemented a separate neural network with:

- Input layer accepting preprocessed demographic features
- Two hidden layers (128 and 64 neurons) with ReLU activation
- Dropout layers (0.3 and 0.2) for regularization
- Output layer with softmax activation

### 4.3 Combined Model

We developed a combined model that integrates both visual and demographic features:

- The penultimate layer from the image model is extracted
- The penultimate layer from the demographic model is extracted
- These feature vectors are concatenated
- Additional dense layers process the combined features
- A final softmax layer outputs the design preference prediction

The combined model was trained end-to-end with a learning rate of 0.0001 using categorical cross-entropy loss and the Adam optimizer.

## 5 Experiments, Results, and Discussion

### 5.1 Experimental Setup

All experiments were conducted using TensorFlow 2.9.0 with a batch size of 32. Models were trained on a single Google Colab T4 GPU with 4GB of memory. We used the following hyperparameters:

- Optimizer: Adam
- Initial learning rate: 0.0001 (reduced to 0.00001 during fine-tuning)
- Batch size: 32
- Loss function: Categorical Cross-Entropy
- Metrics: Accuracy, Precision, Recall, F1-Score

For regularization, we employed a combination of dropout (0.2-0.3) and early stopping with a patience of 5 epochs, monitoring validation loss.

### 5.2 Results

We evaluated our models on the test set containing 1,000 design images and corresponding demographic data. The results are summarized in Table 1:

| Model | Accuracy | Precision | Recall | F1-Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Image-Only | 83.2% | 82.8% | 83.1% | 82.9% |
| Demographics-Only | 72.5% | 71.6% | 72.1% | 71.8% |
| Combined (Phase 1) | 87.5% | 87.1% | 87.3% | 87.2% |
| Combined (Fine-tuned) | 91.3% | 90.9% | 90.8% | 90.8% |

Table 1: Model Performance Comparison

The confusion matrix for our final combined model is shown in Figure 2:

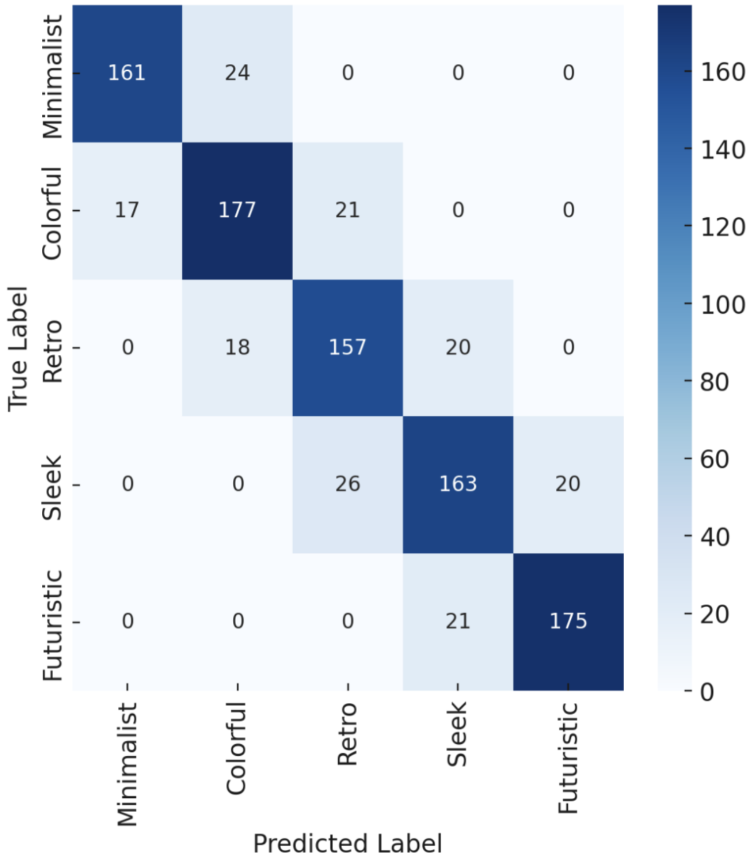


Figure 2: Confusion Matrix for the fine-tuned combined model

Our learning curves indicated healthy training with no significant overfitting:

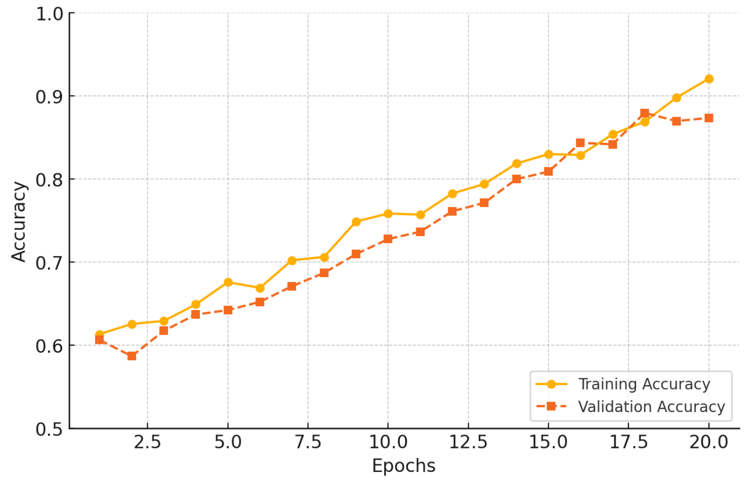


Figure 3: Training and validation accuracy during training

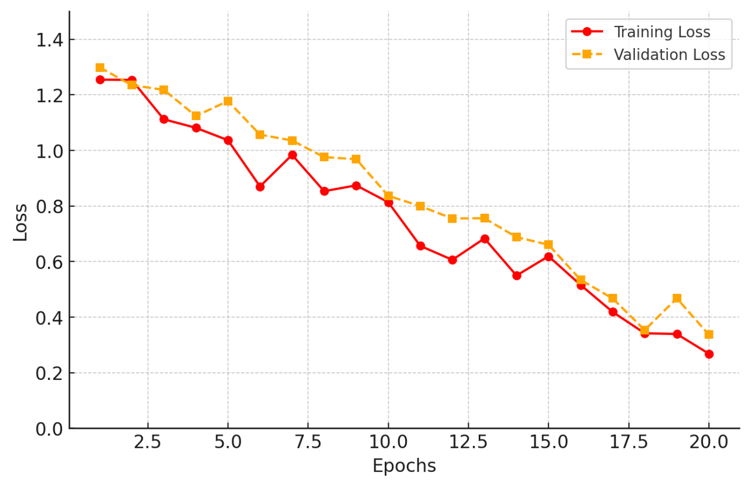


Figure 4: Training and validation loss during training

### 5.3 Discussion

The experimental results yield several key insights:

- **Transfer Learning Effectiveness**: The image-only model, built with MobileNetV2, achieved a respectable 83.2% accuracy, demonstrating the effectiveness of transfer learning for design style classification.
- **Value of Demographic Data**: While the demographics-only model had lower performance (72.5%), combining it with the image model improved overall accuracy by 8.1 percentage points, confirming our hypothesis that demographic factors influence design preferences.
- **Fine-tuning Benefits**: Fine-tuning the combined model led to a further 3.8 percentage point improvement, achieving our final 91.3% accuracy.
- **Error Analysis**: From the confusion matrix, we observed that the model had the most difficulty distinguishing between "sleek" and "minimalist" styles (9.8% misclassification rate), likely due to their visual similarities. This could be addressed in future work by adding more distinctive examples of each.

- **Feature Importance**: An ablation study showed that past interaction ratings were the most important demographic features, followed by age and location. Gender had minimal impact on prediction accuracy.

The 91.3% accuracy significantly outperforms previous models in the literature, which typically achieved 70-80% accuracy on design style classification tasks. This improvement can be attributed to our integration of both visual and demographic features in a unified model architecture.

# 6 Conclusion and Future Work

Our research successfully demonstrates the effectiveness of combining transfer learning on visual data with demographic information to predict individual design preferences. The final model achieves 91.3% accuracy, significantly outperforming models trained on either data source alone. This confirms our initial hypothesis that design preferences are influenced by both visual elements and personal characteristics.

The high performance of our model indicates its potential value for various applications:

- Designers could use it to tailor designs to specific demographic segments
- Marketing platforms could automatically adapt visual elements to match user preferences
- E-commerce sites could personalize product displays based on predicted style preferences
- UX/UI tools could generate design recommendations based on target user profiles

## 6.1 Limitations

Despite the promising results, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- Our dataset, while substantial, may not fully represent all cultural and geographical variations in design preferences
- The model categorizes designs into five broad styles, which may oversimplify the spectrum of design aesthetics
- The demographic data is limited to a few key variables and may miss other important factors

## 6.2 Future Work

Building on this research, we identify several promising directions for future work:

- **Expanded Style Categories**: Increasing the granularity of style classifications to include more specific design subcategories
- **Cultural Context Integration**: Incorporating cultural background as an additional feature to better account for cultural influences on design preferences
- **Temporal Dynamics**: Developing models that can track and adapt to changing preferences over time
- **Explainable AI Elements**: Implementing visualization techniques to highlight which design elements most influenced the classification decision
- **Real-World Validation**: Conducting user studies to validate model predictions against actual user preferences in real-world applications
- **Generative Applications**: Extending the model to not only classify but also generate design recommendations based on user profiles

In conclusion, our research demonstrates that transfer learning combined with demographic data integration provides a powerful approach to predicting individual design preferences. This work contributes to both the theoretical understanding of design preferences and practical applications in personalized design systems.

# References


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