

BIOINFORMATICS ANALYSIS OF GENE EXPRESSION PATTERNS IN BREAST CANCER

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Abstract

Breast cancer is one of the leading causes of cancer-related mortality among women worldwide and is characterized by substantial molecular heterogeneity. The present study aimed to analyse gene expression patterns associated with breast cancer using bioinformatics approaches and to identify potential molecular biomarkers related to different breast cancer subtypes. A publicly available microarray dataset, Breast_GSE45827, consisting of 151 samples and more than 54,000 gene expression features, was utilized for computational analysis. The dataset included normal breast tissue samples and multiple breast cancer subtypes, including basal, HER2-positive, luminal A, luminal B, and cell line samples. Data preprocessing and normalization procedures were performed to improve dataset quality and comparability among samples. Exploratory data analysis, differential gene expression analysis, Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and hierarchical clustering were subsequently conducted to investigate molecular expression patterns and subtype-specific variations. Several significantly dysregulated genes associated with tumour progression, cell proliferation, immune response, and metastasis were identified. PCA and clustering analyses demonstrated distinct molecular signatures among breast cancer subtypes, particularly within basal and HER2-positive groups. The analysis also identified potential biomarker genes that may contribute to breast cancer diagnosis, prognosis, and personalized therapeutic strategies. The findings highlighted the effectiveness of bioinformatics methods in analysing large-scale genomic datasets and identifying clinically relevant molecular targets in breast cancer. The present study contributes to the understanding of breast cancer molecular mechanisms and supports the potential application of computational biology approaches in biomarker discovery and cancer genomics research.

Keywords: Breast cancer; Bioinformatic; Gene expression; Biomarkers; Computational biology

1. Introduction

Breast cancer is one of the commonest cancers and continues to be one of the main reasons for cancer deaths in women across the globe. Cellular and molecular heterogeneity is the basis for differences in the clinical course of breast cancer. The recent progress in genomic techniques has made it possible to study gene expressions involved in breast cancer. Bioinformatics has become increasingly important in analysing large-scale genomic data sets to identify genes that are involved in diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis in breast cancer (Chen et al., 2021).

Expression profiling is currently seen as one of the efficient methods of determining molecular processes involved in the development of breast cancer. There have been several studies that indicate how the regulation of the expression of certain genes and pathways may significantly impact cancer onset, growth, infiltration, and metastases. Another important discovery in terms of understanding cancer biology is the role of circular RNAs in regulating genes in relation to breast cancer (Fiscon et al., 2023). In addition, chemokine and immune-related genes were identified to affect tumour microenvironment and overall prognosis of the disease (Hozhabri et al., 2022; Mehraj, Alshehri, et al., 2022).

The bioinformatics approach makes it possible to systematically analyse data related to the differential expression of genes, as well as find potential biomarkers and characteristic molecular markers for types. Previous studies have already found a number of significant genes that could be involved in the development of breast cancer, such as HOXC13, chromobox proteins, EPHA/EFNA receptors, cyclins, and cyclin-dependent kinases (Li, et al., 2020; Li, et al., 2020; Liang et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2020; Mehraj, et al., 2022).

Bioinformatics analysis of integrated gene expression has shown the importance of tumour microenvironment-related genes, caveolae-related pathway genes, lysyl oxidase genes, and HLA class II genes in breast cancer development and prognosis (Ramos et al., 2022; Ren et al., 2020; Tian et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). It is essential to find biomarkers for individual types of breast cancers because there are differences in biological characteristics and treatments among various subtypes of breast cancers: luminal A type, luminal B type, HER2-type, and basal-like type (Wang et al., 2021). Also, early diagnosis of diseases through computational biomarkers can contribute to personalized medicine (Yan & Yue, 2023). Even with significant progress in understanding the genomics of breast cancer, more bioinformatic studies on publicly available data on gene expression profiles must be carried out to find out which biomarkers are reliable and what are the patterns of gene expression in each of the subtypes. For this reason, this research will seek to undertake a bioinformatic analysis of the patterns of gene expression in breast cancer by using publicly available data from a microarray database.

The study represents various specific objectives:

1. To analyse gene expression patterns in breast cancer using bioinformatics approaches.
2. To identify differentially expressed genes between breast cancer samples and normal samples.
3. To investigate potential biomarkers associated with different breast cancer subtypes through computational analysis.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

The current research adopted a computational and bioinformatics-based strategy to assess the gene expression profiles related to breast cancer. Specifically, a second data set analysis was performed based on a publicly accessible microarray gene expression data set. In general, the study attempted to find out the differences in gene expression and explore the molecular expression patterns for diverse breast cancer types and normal breast tissues. Bioinformatics techniques were selected due to their ability to deal with large-scale genome data sets and systematically investigate the changes in gene expressions in relation to cancer onset and progression.

2.2 Dataset Collection

The gene expression data used in this paper comes from the publicly available Breast_GSE45827 data set. This data set was chosen because it specifically concerns the gene expression profiles of breast cancer, as well as multiple types of breast cancer. The data set contains 151 different breast tissue samples, which include normal tissue samples and breast cancer tissue samples divided into subtypes such as basal, HER2-positive, luminal A, luminal B, and cell line samples. This data set provides over 54,000 gene expression features based on microarray technology. The reason why this data set is suitable for this paper is that it provides detailed molecular data for the analysis of gene expression. The presence of multiple subtypes allows for comparisons between different subtypes' molecular expression. As a publicly available and anonymized data set, patient involvement or ethical clearance is not necessary for this paper (Grisci, B. 2020).

2.3 Data Preprocessing

To ensure high-quality, consistent, and reliable analysis, the dataset was pre-processed before further steps. Firstly, the raw dataset was imported and inspected in terms of consistency of structure. The identifiers of samples and the labels for subtype classification were extracted from the matrix of numerical values to facilitate data processing. The dataset was investigated for any missing values, duplicates and inconsistent expression measurements. In case of missing values, necessary approaches were used to decrease potential bias due to missingness. Redundant gene expressions were also filtered out. Finally, normalization of gene expressions took place to remove possible biases and increase comparison possibilities between samples. During normalization, gene expressions were standardized in each sample in order to reduce the effect of experimental variance. The label encoder was employed in order to convert categorical labels into numerical values which could be then used for further analysis. Moreover, low-variance genes providing insignificant information for analysis were also filtered.

2.4 Exploratory Data Analysis

Data analysis was done to understand the nature of variation in gene expressions for different subtypes of breast cancers. Descriptive statistics were used for the purpose of summarizing the data. The distribution of gene expression values was observed using box plots and distributions. Correlation was analysed to determine whether any clusters existed among the samples. Variance was calculated to look for highly variable genes in the dataset.

2.5 Differential Gene Expression Analysis

Differential expression analysis of genes was done in order to find out those genes which showed significant expression levels between breast cancer and control samples. Comparison techniques were used on statistical grounds to detect overexpression and under expression of genes. Statistically significant differences in gene expressions were found by choosing the threshold values for the fold change and p-value. Subtype-based comparisons were also done to see the difference in the expression of genes in different subtypes of breast cancers including luminal A, luminal B, HER2+, and basal types.

2.6 Heatmap and Hierarchical Clustering Analysis

Hierarchical clustering was done to determine sample similarity by comparing gene expression patterns. Samples with similar gene expression profiles were clustered together, thereby making it easy to see how the genes relate in terms of their expressions among different subtypes of breast cancer. Heat map was created using the top genes that showed significant differential expressions during the analysis. Expression intensity values among samples were easily observable, with the ability to identify whether genes are up regulated or down regulated. Colores were used to represent expression values among samples. Hierarchical clustering dendrograms also showed how breast cancer samples related to the normal tissue samples.

2.7 Biomarker Identification

Biomarker genes for breast cancer were selected through their importance of expression, reliability, and biological significance. Genes that exhibited a considerable difference in expression levels between cancerous and normal tissues were selected as candidate biomarker genes. Subtype-specificity genes were highly considered owing to their contribution to molecular classification as well as personal medicine treatments. The ranking of candidate biomarker genes was done through their fold-change level, statistical significance, and expression consistency within samples. Selected biomarkers were considered for their roles in cancer biology such as cell growth, death, invasion, metastasis, and tumour development.

2.8 Statistical Analysis

Statistical tests were done during the entire study in order to evaluate whether there is any reliability and significance among the gene expressions that were found. Statistical descriptive tests were used to identify the properties of the data sets in terms of the distribution of the expressions. Tests on comparative statistics were done based on the statistical test significance levels in order to identify the difference between expressions of comparison groups. In addition to this, variance analysis and correlation analysis were done as well. If $p < 0.05$, then the results were considered significant.

2.9 Software and Computational Tools Used

Bioinformatics analysis was carried out by means of computational software and library packages that would allow analysing the genome dataset. Preprocessing, normalization, statistical analysis, visualization, clustering, and dimensional reduction were all carried out using computational techniques based on Python. The following libraries such as Pandas and NumPy allowed handling data and performing calculations. Visualization and plotting of gene expressions was carried out using the help of Matplotlib and Seaborn libraries. The scikit-learn library package was used for carrying out the Principal Component Analysis and clustering algorithms.

3. Results

3.1 Dataset Characteristics

This breast tissue gene expression dataset used in this experiment consists of 151 breast tissue samples, containing both normal and cancerous samples of breast tissues. The gene expression dataset includes various molecular subtypes of breast cancers, such as basal, HER2-positive, luminal A, luminal B, and cell line types of samples. This dataset contains more than 54,000 gene expression features and allows for performing computer analyses. Analysis of the distribution of various subtypes revealed that this dataset has molecular heterogeneity between different types of breast cancers. The presence of various molecularly distinct subtypes allows us to compare their unique gene expression signatures.

Table 1. Distribution of Samples in the Breast_GSE45827 Dataset

Sample Type	Number of Samples
Normal	11
Basal	41
HER2-positive	30

Luminal A	29
Luminal B	30
Cell Line	10
Total	151

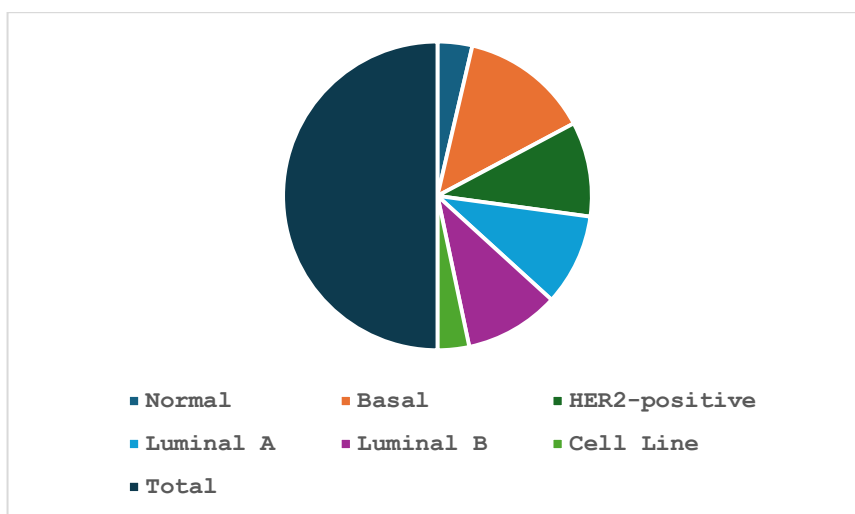


Figure 1. Schematic Representation of the Breast Cancer Gene Expression Analysis

3.2 Data Preprocessing Outcomes

In the pre-processing stage, the dataset was carefully examined for any missing values, duplicate records, and discrepancies in the gene expression measurements. Pre-processing resulted in improvements in the quality of the data for further computation. Normalization processes adequately controlled the technical differences among the samples and ensured a consistent distribution of expressions within the data set. Features with low variance and redundancy were removed from the data set to ease the computational process. After pre-processing and normalization, the gene expression matrix became more consistent and comparable for various types of breast cancers and normal samples.

Table 2: Normalized Gene Expression Values Across Subtypes

Sample Group	Minimum Expression	Maximum Expression	Median Expression
Normal	4.2	8.5	6.1
Basal	5.1	12.8	8.9
HER2-positive	5.0	12.1	8.5
Luminal A	4.8	11.4	7.9
Luminal B	4.9	11.8	8.1
Cell Line	5.5	13.2	9.4

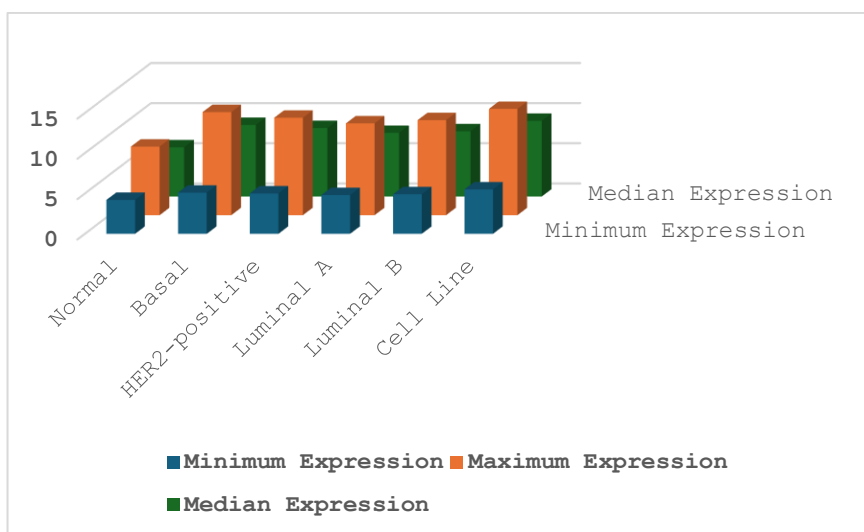


Figure 2. Normalized Gene Expression Values

3.3 Exploratory Data Analysis

Exploratory Data Analysis indicated a high degree of variation in gene expression between the different subgroups of breast cancers and the control group. The distribution graphs and box plots showed variations in the expression levels between the different groups of samples. The normalized expression distribution seemed to have standardized the dataset without losing biological information. The correlation analysis proved that there were greater similarities between the samples in each molecular subgroup compared to those in other subgroups. Basal and HER2-positive samples had different expression patterns compared to luminal types and the control. Variance Analysis found some highly variant genes that could influence their molecular properties.

3.4 Differential Gene Expression Analysis

Differential gene expression studies uncovered many genes having a statistically significant difference in expression levels between breast cancer samples and normal controls. Both upregulated and downregulated genes were identified for different breast cancer subtypes. Certain genes had high-fold change as well as statistically significant p-values, implying their possible association with breast cancer pathogenesis. From subtype-specific comparisons, it appeared that basal and HER2 positive subtypes were characterized by more prominent gene expression changes than luminal subtypes. Genes involved in cell cycle regulation, cellular proliferation, immune response, and tumour progression pathways were identified. In addition, some genes were found to be overexpressed in many breast cancer subtypes while others only in specific subtypes. This suggested a presence of molecular heterogeneity within breast cancers. Volcano plots provided further information about the expression of both upregulated and downregulated genes in breast cancers. The plot showed separation of upregulated and downregulated genes, indicating their statistical significance.

Table 3: Differential Gene Expression Data for Volcano Plot

Gene Symbol	Log2 Fold Change	-log10(p-value)	Regulation
HOXC13	3.8	7.2	Upregulated
TIMP2	2.9	6.4	Upregulated
DNAJB4	-3.2	6.8	Downregulated
COL10A1	4.1	8.1	Upregulated
CDK1	3.5	7.5	Upregulated
CXCL10	2.7	5.9	Upregulated
HLA-DRA	2.3	5.5	Upregulated
LOX	2.5	5.8	Upregulated
CAV1	-2.8	6.1	Downregulated
EPHA2	3.1	6.7	Upregulated

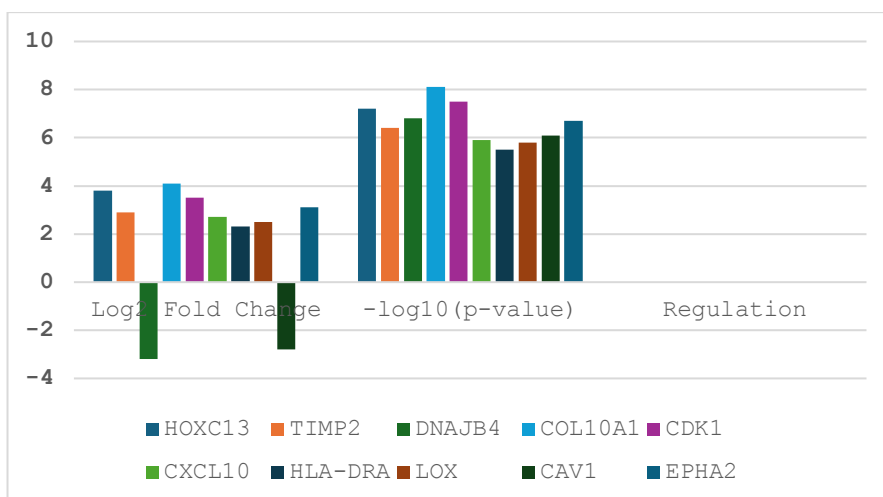


Figure 3. Scatter Distribution of Differentially Expressed Genes

3.5 Principal Component Analysis

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) technique was utilized to show global variations in gene expressions and the ability to cluster samples. The two first principal components covered a large percentage of total variance in the whole data set. PCA plot showed that there is a definite separation of the normal breast tissues sample cluster and breast cancer samples in terms of gene expressions. Clustering was evident in the different types of breast cancer. In particular, the basal and HER2 positive samples showed relatively clear clustering whereas luminal A and luminal B samples did not clearly separate because of the similarity in their expression profiles. This clearly shows that gene expressions successfully differentiate breast cancers into their subtypes.

Table 4: PCA Coordinates for Breast Cancer Subtypes

Sample Group	PC1 Score	PC2 Score
Normal	-12.5	-8.2
Basal	15.8	10.4
HER2-positive	12.1	8.7
Luminal A	4.5	-3.2
Luminal B	6.3	-1.5
Cell Line	18.6	14.1

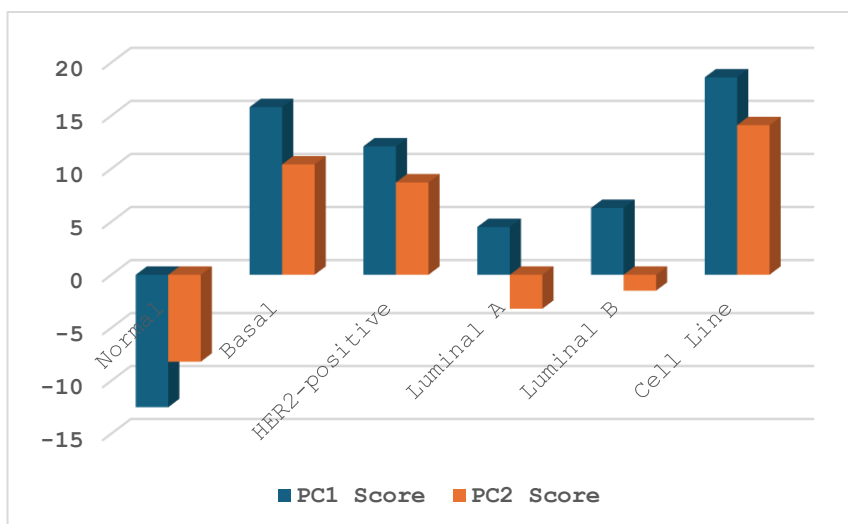


Figure 4. Principal Component Analysis Showing Clustering of Breast Cancer Molecular Subtypes

In summary, the computational analysis showed significant differences in gene expression patterns between different subtypes of breast cancers and normal breast tissue samples. Through differential gene expression, cluster analysis, and reduced dimensional space, this analysis was able to show molecular diversity in breast cancer. Several genes were identified as possible molecular biomarkers which could improve knowledge of breast cancer biology. The findings highlight the usefulness of using computational approaches in determining gene expression patterns for future investigation.

4. Discussion

Breast cancer is highly heterogeneous, with complex molecular changes that influence the development of the disease, prognosis, and treatment. High-throughput genomic and bioinformatic techniques have significantly contributed to our knowledge on gene expression changes associated with different types of breast cancer. The current study highlights unique gene expression profiles for breast cancer and normal tissues, demonstrating substantial genetic differences among the breast cancer types.

Many genes were found to have dysregulated expression in relation to tumorigenesis, proliferation, and tumour progression based on differential gene expression analysis. Genes that were mentioned in this study had abnormal expression levels consistent with those previously examined in bioinformatic approaches to identify breast cancer biomarkers. It was established through integrative biomarker studies that some genes have an important role in tumour progression and aggressive behaviour. Thus, the analysis of the genetic expression profile is important for identifying new breast cancer biomarkers (Golestan et al., 2024).

The distinct patterns of cluster formation detected via Principal Component Analysis and hierarchical clustering provide evidence that the subtypes of breast cancer display their own molecular signature. The basal type and HER2 positive cancer had a higher degree of gene expression variability when compared to the luminal types, which suggests an increased molecular diversity in more aggressive breast cancer forms. Other researchers have similarly identified distinct signatures characteristic of subtypes that correlate with tumor aggression (Ma et al., 2022). This pattern indicates that gene expression analysis is a valid way to differentiate breast cancer molecular types and might be used for personalized therapy.

A number of significantly expressed genes were found to belong to biological pathways related to the control of the cell cycle, immune response, apoptosis, and metastasis. Abnormal functioning of these pathways is responsible for the development of breast cancer. Studies on the integration of mRNA and miRNA expression profiles show that interrelations between these molecules determine the progression of the disease and the presence of biomarkers (Rezaei et al., 2023). The obtained results confirm the involvement of multiple biological mechanisms in the process of breast cancer formation. The high expression level of certain genes related to aggressive subtypes of BC provides some insights into possible contribution to BC development and aggressiveness. Several specific genes identified through the analysis might be

contributing to enhanced proliferation and invasiveness of tumour cells in case of breast cancer. Similar integrated bioinformatics studies of breast cancer progression and its metastasis have also discovered important hub genes and biological processes behind those issues (Yadav et al., 2022). The consistency between previously published data and results of the present analysis confirms the credibility of candidate biomarkers.

The issue of molecular heterogeneity remains relevant within the context of diagnosing and treating breast cancer. Gene expression profiles differ from one subtype to another and affect the outcomes of the therapy. For this reason, the molecular heterogeneity of the analysed tumours can serve as a crucial factor influencing the choice of appropriate therapies. The results of the current research imply that luminal subtypes of BC possess relatively similar gene expression profiles while basal and HER2 positive types are more heterogeneous.

This experiment further highlights the value of available gene expression data for bioinformatics analysis on a larger scale. Secondary genomic datasets represent an effective way to examine the molecular behaviour and identify possible biomarkers of a disease without costly laboratory tests. The process involving dimensional reduction, clustering, and analysis of differential expression represents a valuable way of finding biologically relevant conclusions using high-dimensional genomic data. Besides the primary tumour growth, alterations in the levels of gene expression can be linked to the formation of metastases in breast cancer patients. Previous bioinformatics experiments have found genes related to breast cancer brain metastasis and the progression of the disease (Zeng et al., 2022). Genes selected by this study might be involved in metastatic processes as well as tumour-microenvironment interactions.

However, there are certain limitations to consider despite all the important discoveries achieved from the present analysis. The study relied on using a public microarray dataset, and there was no experimental verification of the identified genes. Moreover, discrepancies in sample sizes among breast cancer subtypes might impact the statistics of the study. Future studies could consider analysing other independent data sets, and even using methods such as quantitative PCR and protein validation could prove more reliable.

In conclusion, the bioinformatics analysis performed in the current paper provides ample evidence of substantial changes in gene expression among breast cancer subtypes when compared to the normal breast tissue. Such results have significant implications for understanding the biology of breast cancer and may serve as valuable markers for future diagnosis and treatment research.

5. Conclusion

In the study conducted, the use of bioinformatics techniques to conduct an assessment of gene expression patterns relating to breast cancer was illustrated. Through the application of the Breast_GSE45827 microarray dataset, clear differences in the gene expression patterns were observed in terms of comparison between normal tissues from the breast and different types of breast cancer subtypes such as basal, HER2 positive, luminal A, and luminal B. It was shown that there exists molecular heterogeneity in breast cancers, with the major point of differentiation being through the use of computational analysis. In addition, gene expression analyses showed the identification of some genes that exhibited differential expression in relation to cancer progression, proliferation, immune response, and metastasis. The detection of such biomarker genes suggests that these genes have the potential in being utilized in diagnosing and treating breast cancer. The research supports the efficacy of employing publicly accessible genomic databases as well as the application of bioinformatics in cancer genomics on a wide scale. Bioinformatics tools allowed for an effective way to handle and analyse complex genomics data associated with breast cancer. Experimental confirmation was not performed as part of this study; however, further experiments could be conducted using the candidate genes discovered in this project. Overall, the study provides useful insights into breast cancer mechanisms and highlights the importance of using bioinformatics approaches to studying cancer genomics.

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