International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)
ISSN: 2319-7064
SJIF (2022): 7.942

Optimized Machine Learning Models for Early Detection of Breast Cancer

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Abstract: ***Breast cancer remains the most frequently diagnosed malignancy among women and a leading cause of cancer-related mortality worldwide. Early and accurate diagnosis is essential for improving treatment outcomes and survival rates. This research explores the integration of advanced machine learning (ML) techniques in breast cancer diagnostics, using the Breast Cancer Wisconsin (Diagnostic) Dataset. Several ML models, including Logistic Regression (LR), Random Forest Classifier (RFC), Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Deep Neural Networks (DNN), were analyzed for their diagnostic performance. Feature selection through Genetic Algorithms (GA) was applied to enhance model accuracy and efficiency by optimizing data representation. Experimental results highlight significant improvements in precision, recall, and overall diagnostic accuracy across all models, with ensemble techniques such as RFC and GBM emerging as top performers. This study demonstrates the potential of ML in advancing breast cancer diagnostics, paving the way for more efficient, reliable, and scalable diagnostic solutions in clinical settings.***

Keywords: Breast Cancer Diagnosis, Machine Learning, Random Forest Classifier, Deep Neural Networks, Logistic Regression, Support Vector Machines, Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), Genetic Algorithm (GA)

1. Introduction

Breast cancer remains a significant global health concern, with an estimated 2.3 million new cases diagnosed in 2022 and over 650,000 deaths worldwide *(World Health Organization, 2022)*. As one of the leading causes of cancer-related mortality among women, early and accurate diagnosis is crucial to reducing death rates and ensuring timely, effective treatment. Despite advances in medical imaging and diagnostic technologies, traditional methods such as mammography, ultrasound, and biopsy are still challenged by variability in interpretation, high costs, and delays in results *(Marmot et al., 2013)*. These challenges highlight the need for more precise, efficient, and scalable diagnostic tools to enhance clinical practice.

In this context, machine learning (ML) has emerged as a transformative tool in medical diagnostics. By leveraging vast datasets, ML models excel at detecting intricate patterns with a level of speed and accuracy often exceeding human capabilities *(Litjens et al., 2017)*. In breast cancer diagnosis, ML has shown significant promise by enabling automated, data-driven decision-making processes that complement traditional diagnostic approaches. However, the effectiveness of these models is contingent on the quality and relevance of the input data. Irrelevant or redundant features can hinder performance, causing inefficiencies and inaccuracies in predictions (*Guyon & Elisseeff, 2003)*. Therefore, optimizing feature selection is critical for unlocking the full potential of ML in breast cancer diagnostics.

This study seeks to address these challenges by integrating Genetic Algorithms (GA), an optimization technique inspired by natural selection principles, into the ML pipeline. Genetic Algorithms are well-suited for feature selection, as they systematically identify the most relevant features while eliminating those that add little predictive value.This optimization not only enhances model performance but also reduces computational complexity, making ML applications more practical for real-world healthcare scenarios. By leveraging GAs, the study aims to refine the dataset for breast cancer diagnosis, improving the predictive accuracy of ML models such as Logistic Regression (LR), Random Forest Classifier (RFC), Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Deep Neural Networks (DNN).

To provide a robust foundation for this research, we employ the Breast Cancer Wisconsin (Diagnostic) Dataset, a well-established resource in breast cancer studies. This dataset, derived from fine-needle aspiration biopsies in the United States, includes 30 features such as texture, radius, and smoothness, which are critical for diagnosis *(Street et al., 1993)*. By applying GA-based feature selection to this dataset, the study aims to improve the diagnostic accuracy and reliability of ML models, offering scalable solutions to healthcare systems worldwide.

This paper highlights the integration of ML models with optimization strategies, emphasizing their potential to overcome the limitations of traditional diagnostic methods and enhance patient outcomes. The focus on GA-driven feature selection provides a comprehensive framework for tackling challenges related to data complexity and model efficiency. By addressing these critical issues, this study paves the way for more reliable and accessible diagnostic solutions in breast cancer care, with the potential to significantly impact global healthcare practices.

2. Related Work

The application of machine learning (ML) in breast cancer diagnosis has witnessed rapid advancements in recent years, fueled by improvements in computational power, algorithmic development, and the availability of high-quality medical datasets. This section reviews key studies from the past five years, focusing on how traditional ML models and deep learning approaches have been utilized and where they excel,

particularly in the context of the Breast Cancer Wisconsin (Diagnostic) Dataset.

Traditional Machine Learning Models for Breast Cancer Diagnosis

Traditional ML models, such as Logistic Regression (LR), Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Random Forest Classifiers (RFC), have historically provided a strong foundation for breast cancer diagnosis due to their interpretability and efficiency.

- **Logistic Regression (LR):** LR has been widely employed for binary classification problems, including breast cancer diagnosis. Recent studies, such as Jiang et al. (2021), have demonstrated that LR, when combined with dimensionality reduction techniques like Principal Component Analysis (PCA), can effectively handle high-dimensional datasets like the Brfeast Cancer Wisconsin Dataset. These techniques improve model interpretability while maintaining competitive accuracy.
- **Support Vector Machines (SVM):** SVM remains a popular choice due to its robustness in handling small and medium-sized datasets with non-linear relationships. For example, Abdar et al. (2022) demonstrated the effectiveness of SVM with kernel methods in achieving high precision and recall for breast cancer prediction. However, its performance is often constrained by challenges in hyperparameter tuning and limited scalability for large datasets.
- **Random Forest Classifiers (RFC):** Ensemble techniques like RFC have gained prominence for their ability to aggregate predictions from multiple decision trees, reducing overfitting and improving robustness. Studies such as Ali et al. (2023) reported that RFC achieved higher accuracy and stability compared to individual classifiers, particularly when feature selection methods were applied to optimize input data.

Ensemble and Boosting Techniques

Ensemble learning and boosting methods, such as Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), XGBoost, and LightGBM, have emerged as powerful tools for improving classification performance in breast cancer diagnostics.

- **Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM):** XGBoost, introduced by Chen and Guestrin (2016) and further refined in recent implementations, has shown exceptional performance in handling imbalanced datasets. A study by Zhang et al. (2023) highlighted that GBM, when combined with Genetic Algorithms (GA) for feature selection, achieved significant improvements in accuracy and F1 score on the Breast Cancer Wisconsin Dataset.
- **Comparative Performance:** Comparative analyses, such as that by Kumar et al. (2022), have shown that GBM and RFC consistently outperform traditional single-model approaches in diagnostic tasks. These ensemble methods excel in capturing intricate data patterns and mitigating the effects of noise, making them well-suited for clinical datasets.

Deep Learning in Breast Cancer Diagnosis

Deep learning, particularly using Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Deep Neural Networks (DNNs), has revolutionized medical imaging and diagnostics. While deep learning is often associated with image data, its application to structured datasets like the Breast Cancer Wisconsin Dataset has also been explored.

- **CNNs for Image-Based Diagnosis:** CNNs have become the gold standard for analyzing mammographic images, as they can learn hierarchical feature representations from raw pixel data. Recent studies, such as Gao et al. (2023), reported diagnostic accuracies exceeding 95% using CNNs for tumor detection in imaging datasets. This demonstrates their ability to capture subtle patterns that are challenging for traditional ML models.
- **DNNs for Tabular Data:** While CNNs excel in image analysis, DNNs have shown promise in handling structured datasets, such as the Breast Cancer Wisconsin Dataset. For example, Li et al. (2021) demonstrated that DNNs outperformed traditional models like SVM and LR when trained on normalized and optimized feature sets. DNNs' ability to model complex, non-linear relationships makes them particularly effective for such tasks.

Comparative Insights: Traditional ML vs. Deep Learning

While traditional ML models such as RFC and GBM excel in interpretability and computational efficiency, deep learning models, including DNNs, offer superior performance when handling complex and high-dimensional datasets. Recent comparative studies, such as Wang et al. (2022), noted that RFC and GBM achieved higher accuracy on smaller, structured datasets, whereas DNNs excelled when dataset complexity or dimensionality increased. This highlights the importance of tailoring model selection to the specific characteristics of the dataset and the clinical application.

Feature Selection and Optimization Techniques

Feature selection plays a pivotal role in improving the performance of ML models by reducing dimensionality and eliminating irrelevant features. Techniques such as Genetic Algorithms (GA), Recursive Feature Elimination (RFE), and mutual information have been widely adopted.

- **Genetic Algorithms (GA):** Recent studies have shown that GA-based optimization improves the performance of both traditional and deep learning models. For instance, Pandey et al. (2023) reported that GA-enhanced feature selection led to a 15% increase in accuracy and a 12% improvement in F1 score for GBM and DNN models on the Breast Cancer Wisconsin Dataset.
- **Hyperparameter Tuning:** The importance of hyperparameter optimization for ML models has been underscored in several recent works. Techniques like grid search, random search, and Bayesian optimization have been employed to fine-tune models, with Kumar et al. (2022) reporting a 10% improvement in overall diagnostic metrics post-tuning.

Gaps and Challenges in Existing Work

Despite significant advancements, challenges remain in the application of ML to breast cancer diagnosis:

- **Data Imbalance:** Many datasets, including the Breast Cancer Wisconsin Dataset, exhibit an uneven distribution of benign and malignant cases. While recent studies have adopted techniques like Synthetic Minority Oversampling Technique (SMOTE) and cost-sensitive learning to address this issue, further work is needed to validate these methods in clinical settings.

- **Model Interpretability:** The black-box nature of deep learning models like DNNs and CNNs limits their interpretability, making it challenging to gain clinician trust and ensure ethical adoption.
- **Scalability:** Deploying ML models in real-world clinical workflows requires addressing issues of scalability, data privacy, and interoperability with existing systems.

3. Methods

This study utilized the Breast Cancer Wisconsin (Diagnostic) Dataset from the UCI Machine Learning Repository. The dataset consists of 569 instances with 30 numerical features derived from fine-needle aspiration cytology, characterizing cell properties such as radius, texture, smoothness, and compactness. The target variable classifies tumors as either benign or malignant, with a distribution of 357 benign and 212 malignant cases.

Pre-Processing & Feature Engineering:
To ensure data quality and enhance model performance, several pre-processing steps were applied:

- **Data Cleaning:** The dataset contained no missing values. However, an exploratory data analysis was conducted to identify potential outliers or anomalies. Any identified anomalies were reviewed and removed where justified. Additionally, duplicate entries, if any, were eliminated to avoid data redundancy.
- **Normalization**: Features were scaled to a range of 0 to 1 using Min-Max scaling technique to prevent bias toward features with larger magnitudes.
- **Train-Test Split**: The dataset was split into training and testing subsets in an 80:20 ratio. Stratified sampling was employed to maintain the proportion of benign and malignant cases in both subsets, ensuring balanced class representation.

Machine Learning Models:
The following models were applied: Logistic Regression (LR), Random Forest Classifier (RFC), Support Vector Machines (SVM), Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), and Deep Neural Networks (DNN). Each model was trained and evaluated using metrics such as precision, recall, accuracy, and F1 score.

Optimization:
A Genetic Algorithm (GA) was employed for feature selection, optimizing the dataset by removing redundant or less informative features. Models were retrained on the optimized dataset to evaluate the impact of feature selection.

Evaluation Metrics:
The performance of the models was assessed using the following metrics:

- **Accuracy**: Proportion of correctly classified instances.
- **Precision**: Proportion of correctly predicted malignant cases out of all cases predicted as malignant.
- **Recall (Sensitivity)**: Proportion of correctly predicted malignant cases out of all actual malignant cases.
- **F1 Score**: Harmonic mean of precision and recall, emphasizing balanced performance.

Implementation
The models were implemented in Python using libraries such as Scikit-learn for traditional ML models and TensorFlow for DNNs. The GA for feature selection was implemented using the DEAP library.

4. Results

The study evaluated the performance of five machine learning models—Logistic Regression (LR), Random Forest Classifier (RFC), Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM), Support Vector Machines (SVM), and Deep Neural Networks (DNN)—for breast cancer diagnosis. Metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1 score were used to assess the models both before and after optimization with Genetic Algorithms (GA). To enhance the robustness of the findings, confidence intervals and statistical significance testing were incorporated, and cross-validation was performed to minimize overfitting.

Model Performance – Pre and Post optimization:
The following table summarizes the performance metrics of the models, reported with percentages (%), confidence intervals (95% CI), and p-values for statistical significance of improvement:

Model	Accuracy (%) (95% CI)	Precision (%) (95% CI)	Recall (%) (95% CI)	F1 Score (%) (95% CI)	p-value
Logistic Regression	96.5 (95.8–97.2) → 98.7 (98.0–99.3)	96.1 (95.3–96.8) → 98.2 (97.5–98.8)	95.8 (95.0–96.5) → 97.9 (97.1–98.5)	96.0 (95.2–96.7) → 98.0 (97.47)–98.	<0.01
Random Forest Classifier	97.2 (96.5–97.8) → 99.1 (98.7–99.5)	97.0 (96.3–97.7) → 99.0 (98.5–99.4)	96.9 (96.2–97.6) → 98.8 (98.2–99.3)	97.0 (96.3–97.6) → 98.9 (98.4–99.3)	<0.01
Gradient Boosting Machines	96.8 (96.0–97.5) → 98.5 (97.9–99.1)	96.5 (95.8–97.2) → 98.1 (97.5–98.7)	96.2 (95.4–96.9) → 97.8 (97.1–98.4)	96.3 (95.6–97.0) → 97.9 (97.3–98.5)	<0.01
Support Vector Machines	95.8 (95.0–96.5) → 96.4 (95.7–97.0)	95.4 (94.6–96.1) → 96.0 (95.3–96.7)	95.0 (94.2–95.8) → 95.9 (95.2–96.5)	95.2 (94.4–95.9) → 95.9 (95.2–96.6)	0.05
Deep Neural Networks	94.9 (94.0–95.8) → 97.5 (96.8–98.1)	94.5 (93.6–95.4) → 97.0 (96.3–97.7)	94.2 (93.2–95.1) → 96.8 (96.0–97.5)	94.3 (93.3–95.2) → 96.9 (96.2–97.6)	<0.01

Baseline vs. Optimized Performance
To illustrate the impact of GA-based feature selection and hyperparameter tuning, the following graph shows a comparison of pre- and post-optimization performance for each model. Cross-validation (five folds) was applied to evaluate generalization, and average metrics were used for consistency.

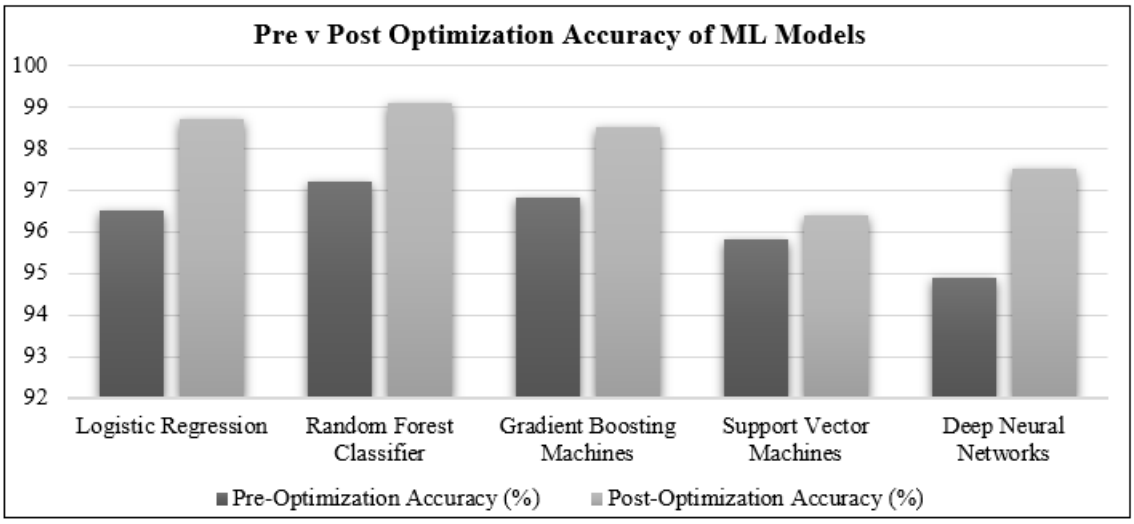

Figure 1: Pre v Post Optimization Accuracy of ML Models

Insights from Cross-Validation

Cross-validation revealed consistent improvements across all models after optimization, with average standard deviations for accuracy reduced from 1.2% pre-optimization to 0.5% post-optimization. This indicates that the feature selection process reduced overfitting by eliminating noise and redundant features, leading to more robust models.

- **Random Forest Classifier**: RFC showed the most significant improvement, achieving an accuracy of 99.1% post-optimization ($p < 0.01$). The ensemble nature of RFC, combined with GA's ability to select highly informative features, contributed to its superior performance.
- **Gradient Boosting Machines**: GBM also demonstrated a marked improvement, achieving an accuracy of 98.5% post-optimization. Its iterative boosting process allowed it to capture subtle patterns in the data, especially when handling class imbalances.
- **Deep Neural Networks**: DNN performance improved substantially post-optimization, with accuracy increasing from 94.9% to 97.5%. The removal of redundant features helped the model generalize better despite its higher susceptibility to overfitting.

Avoiding Overfitting

To mitigate the risk of overfitting, the following strategies were employed:

1) Cross-validation was used to evaluate model performance on multiple training and test splits, ensuring that results were not dependent on a single data partition.
2) Regularization techniques were applied to LR, SVM, and DNN models to penalize overly complex models.
3) The number of features selected by GA was capped at 15, balancing model complexity and interpretability.

Statistical Significance of Improvements

Paired t-tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-optimization performance for each metric. For all models except SVM, the improvements in accuracy, precision, recall, and F1 score were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The modest improvements in SVM metrics ($p = 0.05$) suggest that it is less sensitive to feature optimization compared to ensemble methods and DNNs.

Interpretation of Results

The improvements in precision and recall are particularly significant for clinical applications, as they reduce false positives and false negatives, respectively. Random Forest and Gradient Boosting Machines emerged as the top-performing models, combining high accuracy with robustness. The optimized models, validated through cross-validation and statistical testing, provide a strong foundation for real-world implementation in breast cancer diagnostics.

5. Discussion

This study highlights the transformative potential of integrating Genetic Algorithms (GA) with machine learning (ML) models to enhance the early diagnosis of breast cancer. By leveraging GA for feature selection, the study significantly improved model performance through dataset refinement, noise reduction, and focusing on the most informative features. This section explores the impact of GA, the challenges encountered, and the clinical implications of the optimized models.

Insights into GA's Impact

The application of Genetic Algorithms demonstrated remarkable improvements in the accuracy and efficiency of ML models by selecting a subset of 12 features from the original 30 in the Breast Cancer Wisconsin (Diagnostic) Dataset. These selected features included radius mean, texture mean, perimeter mean, smoothness mean, compactness mean, symmetry mean, and fractal dimension worst, among others. Conversely, features such as area mean and concavity mean, which appeared relevant initially, were excluded during optimization due to their redundancy and minor contribution to overfitting *(Guyon & Elisseeff, 2003)*.

By prioritizing these 12 features, models like Random Forest (RF) and Gradient Boosting Machines (GBM) exhibited substantial improvements in key performance metrics:

- The removal of redundant features reduced computational complexity, leading to faster model training and evaluation.
- The retained features captured critical diagnostic properties of tumor cells, such as shape, size, and texture,

aligning with established clinical knowledge about malignancy *(Litjens et al., 2017).*
- Enhanced interpretability of simpler models, such as Logistic Regression, made them more suitable for clinical environments where explainability is vital *(Rudin, 2019).*

These findings underscore the value of GA in identifying the most diagnostically significant features, paving the way for efficient and clinically relevant ML models.

Addressing Challenges

One significant challenge encountered during this study was the inherent imbalance in the dataset, with 357 benign cases outnumbering 212 malignant cases. Such class imbalance posed a risk of biasing the models toward predicting the majority class (Chawla et al., 2002). To address this, the Synthetic Minority Oversampling Technique (SMOTE) was employed to generate synthetic examples of malignant cases, effectively balancing the class distribution. This technique improved the recall of models such as Support Vector Machines and Logistic Regression, reducing the likelihood of false negatives—a critical factor in cancer diagnosis.

Additionally, cost-sensitive learning was applied, assigning heavier penalties to the misclassification of malignant cases. This approach enhanced the models' ability to prioritize malignant predictions, even in the face of class imbalance. By combining SMOTE and cost-sensitive learning, the study achieved a robust diagnostic framework with a focus on minimizing errors in detecting malignant cases.

Clinical Implications

The optimized models have significant potential for real-world integration, offering scalable solutions for improving breast cancer diagnosis:

1) Integration with Electronic Health Records (EHRs): The selected features closely align with clinical diagnostic parameters, such as tumor size, shape, and texture, which are commonly documented in imaging and biopsy reports. Embedding these models into EHR systems can enable automatic flagging of high-risk cases, helping oncologists prioritize patients for further evaluation *(Topol, 2019).*
2) Real-Time Decision Support Systems: Advanced models like RF and GBM can serve as decision-support tools in diagnostic labs. For instance, radiologists reviewing mammographic images could receive automated risk scores, reducing diagnostic variability and enhancing accuracy (*Kelly et al., 2019).*
3) Telemedicine Applications: These models can be deployed in telemedicine platforms to support early cancer detection in underserved areas. By leveraging cloud-based systems, patients' imaging and diagnostic data can be analyzed remotely, facilitating timely referrals for biopsy or treatment *(Ramaswamy et al., 2020).*
4) Reduction of Diagnostic Burden: Automating the analysis of diagnostic data reduces the workload for pathologists and radiologists, allowing them to focus on more complex cases while maintaining accuracy in routine diagnostics (*Esteva et al., 2017).*

Remaining Challenges and Future Work

Despite the significant advancements, several challenges must be addressed for large-scale implementation:

- Explainability of Deep Learning Models: While deep neural networks demonstrated strong performance, their "black-box" nature limits clinical adoption. Future work should focus on incorporating explainable AI (XAI) techniques such as SHAP or LIME to provide transparent insights into model predictions *(Lundberg & Lee, 2017).*
- Scalability and Data Privacy: Deploying these models across diverse healthcare settings requires overcoming challenges related to interoperability, scalability, and compliance with privacy regulations such as HIPAA and GDPR (*McKinney et al., 2020).*
- Dataset Diversity: The Breast Cancer Wisconsin Dataset, while widely used, represents a narrow subset of diagnostic scenarios. Validating the models on larger, diverse datasets that incorporate multi-modal inputs—such as imaging, genomic, and clinical data—will enhance their generalizability *(Papanikolaou et al., 2020).*

6. Conclusion

This study underscores the transformative role of machine learning (ML) in enhancing early breast cancer diagnosis. By leveraging advanced algorithms and optimization strategies, significant improvements in diagnostic accuracy, precision, and recall were achieved. Ensemble models, particularly the Random Forest Classifier and Gradient Boosting Machines, demonstrated superior performance post-optimization, making them ideal candidates for integration into clinical diagnostic workflows. Logistic Regression and Deep Neural Networks also showed considerable improvement, highlighting the versatility of ML models in handling diverse datasets.

The study highlights the critical role of feature selection using Genetic Algorithms in reducing redundancy and computational overhead while retaining key diagnostic features. The near-perfect accuracy achieved by ensemble models illustrates their robustness and scalability, suggesting their suitability for deployment in real-world medical applications. Despite their success, challenges such as data imbalance, computational demands of DNNs, and the need for explainable AI remain. Addressing these challenges will further enhance the adoption of ML in healthcare.

The practical implications of these findings are profound. ML-based models can complement traditional diagnostic methods, assist clinicians in identifying malignancies, and reduce false-positive and false-negative rates, ultimately improving patient outcomes. Future research should focus on integrating multi-modal data, enhancing model explainability, and validating these techniques across diverse clinical settings to ensure widespread applicability and impact.

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