A. V. Mikhailova, M. V. Sheremet,
1 st year students of School of Business of BSU
Scientific supervisor:
Ph D in Physics and Mathematics,
Associate Professor
O. A. Kavalenka

VPNS AND INTERNET LIBERTY

In today's digital age, the Internet is a vast playground and a battleground of ideas and information. However, this expanse has its limitations and threats. Internet liberty, or the freedom to access and share information online without undue restrictions, is a core aspect of modern digital rights. Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) have emerged as pivotal tools in the fight for this freedom. They allow users to circumvent geographical restrictions and enhance privacy and security online.

VPN stands for **"Virtual Private Network"** and describes the opportunity to establish a protected network connection when using public networks. VPNs encrypt your internet traffic and disguise your online identity. This makes it more difficult for third parties to track your activities online and steal data. The encryption takes place in **real time**.

Types of VPN

Site-to-site VPN (Site-to-site VPNs connect multiple networks securely over the internet. Businesses with multiple branches use them for seamless communication and resource sharing. They can also be used to connect a company's network with those of partners, suppliers, or customers);

Remote access VPN (Remote access VPNs allow off-site users to securely connect to the company's main data center by encrypting all data transmitted and received. This ensures data security regardless of the user's location. Encrypted data creates a virtual private connection between the enterprise network and the user, ensuring secure data transfer without the risk of interception or leakage);

Cloud VPN (Cloud VPN, also known as VPN as a Service (VPNaaS), is designed for cloud environments. It allows users to securely access company resources in the cloud through a web interface or application. Unlike traditional VPNs that require specialized infrastructure, cloud VPNs are easily integrated into a company's cloud environment. They enable rapid setup and deployment worldwide, improve security, and enable companies to build more adaptable and scalable cloud systems);

SSL VPN (Unlike some VPN solutions, an SSL VPN does not require specialized VPN client software on users' devices. Instead, it uses standard web browsers, making it more accessible and reducing the deployment complexity. All communications between the user's web browser and the VPN device are encrypted, making it safe for data transfer across potentially insecure networks);

Double VPN (while the double VPN method heightens security by adding an extra layer of encryption, it can also lead to slower connection speeds. This slowdown is a result of the data passing through two separate servers and undergoing dual encryption processes. While beneficial for those seeking augmented security, it may not be ideal for all due to potential performance impacts). See Picture 1.
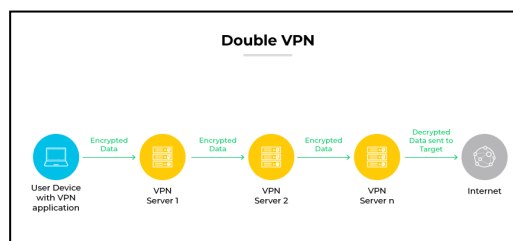

Fig. 1. Double VPN [2].

One of the primary benefits of using a VPN is the enhancement of privacy and anonymity online. By masking your IP address, a VPN ensures that your online actions are virtually untraceable More importantly, it encrypts your data, making it difficult for cybercriminals, surveillance agencies, or even internet service providers to monitor your activities or intercept sensitive information. This is crucial for maintaining personal privacy and for activists, journalists, and others who might be targeted in repressive regimes.

VPNs are powerful tools for overcoming internet censorship and accessing restricted content. In countries where internet access is heavily controlled and certain websites are blocked, VPNs provide a means to bypass these restrictions.

Benefits of using a VPN to overcome Internet censorship:

1. Unrestricted access to censored websites and content

2. Enhanced privacy and security

3. Surveillance protection: VPNs can protect your online activity from government surveillance.

By facilitating access to an extensive array of information and services, ranging from international news organizations to diverse social media networks, this tool significantly enhances the breadth and diversity of content available to users. In doing so, it plays a crucial role in promoting a more open and informed society. It empowers individuals with the ability to seek out and consume a wide variety of perspectives and dialogues, thereby contributing to a global culture that values information accessibility and freedom of expression.
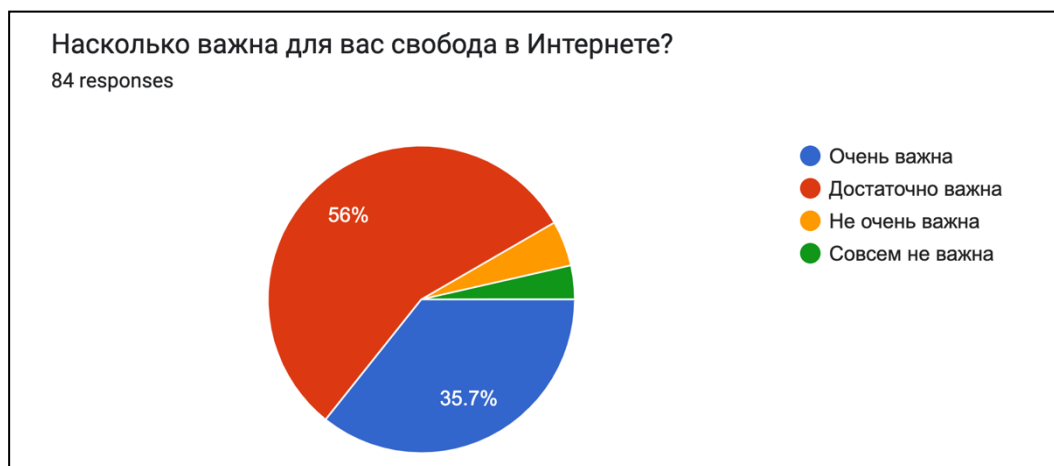
Pic. 2. How important is Internet freedom to you?

To ensure clarity and accuracy, the survey was conducted in Russian, considering it is the native language of the majority of respondents. 84 people took part in our survey. In Picture 2 you can see one of our questions. The majority of respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness about VPNs, indicating a broad understanding of this technology across the general population. This awareness is crucial as VPNs are vital for navigating internet censorship and maintaining digital privacy. In terms of usage, a significant number of respondents either use VPNs regularly or occasionally. This pattern of usage underscores the critical role VPNs play in empowering individuals to access unrestricted internet, particularly in environments where regulatory oppressions are prevalent. The primary reasons for using VPNs, as indicated by the survey responses, include accessing blocked websites and content that is geographically restricted. This underscores VPNs as essential tools for breaking through both governmental and geographical information barriers, allowing users broader access to global content. Most survey participants emphasized the crucial importance of

internet freedom. This strong emphasis on the value of internet freedom reflects a widespread demand for unimpeded access to information and freedom of expression, highlighting the societal importance of digital rights and liberties. Many respondents perceive VPNs as significantly contributing to Internet freedom. They are fundamental in protecting users against stringent online censorship and surveillance. This perception highlights the importance of VPNs in safeguarding personal liberties and privacy.

In conclusion, the data from the survey indicates that VPNs are indispensable for maintaining internet freedom in Belarus. They play a crucial role in enabling users to freely access information and maintain privacy amidst a landscape marked by severe restrictions and governmental oversight. The continued support for technologies that enhance internet freedom and protect personal data is essential, reflecting a critical need in Belarusian. Surveying Russian ensured that the questions were easily understandable, which helped gather accurate and reliable data that genuinely reflected the respondents' sentiments regarding the use of VPNs and Internet freedom.

While VPNs offer significant advantages, they are not without risks. The effectiveness and reliability of a VPN largely depend on the service provider. Your VPN provider can log some information, such as your IP address, so you should be aware of their data collection and logging policies. If the VPN provider experiences an attack or data breach, your organization's sensitive information and employees' personal data could be compromised or revealed. Additionally, in some countries, the use of VPNs is restricted or forbidden, posing legal risks to users.

VPNs enhance Internet liberty by providing essential privacy, security, and freedom to access information. They shield against surveillance, censorship, and cyber threats, empowering users to navigate the digital world more freely and securely. However, the choice of VPN provider is critical, as it determines the level of protection and anonymity one receives. As internet liberty continues to be a hotly debated topic, the importance of tools like VPNs in maintaining the sanctity of online freedom cannot be overstated. By understanding and utilizing VPNs, individuals can take proactive steps toward safeguarding their digital rights in an increasingly connected world.

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