11. A DIGITAL FOOTPRINT AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

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This paper explores the concept of digital footprint and privacy concerns in the online environment. It discusses the definition and types of digital footprint, highlighting the differences between active and passive footprints.

A digital footprint, also sometimes referred to as an information footprint, is the data that each person leaves behind when using the Internet. Such data can be personal profiles and accounts in social networks, information about website traffic, personal messages, comments, photos, personal data of the user [1]. A digital footprint can be used to track person's activities and devices on the Internet. In other words, a digital footprint is a user's virtual identity, i.e. the information they transmit daily through the World Wide Web by sending emails, exchanging links with friends, registering on websites or social networks [2].

The expansion of the digital footprint occurs through social media postings, newsletter subscriptions, reviews left and online shopping. The process of expanding your digital footprint is not always obvious: for example, websites may track activity by setting cookies on your device, and apps may collect data without your knowledge [3, p. 94].

Internet users form their digital footprint actively or passively. A person leaves an active digital footprint when they intentionally share information about themselves by posting on social media or commenting on websites. If a user has used a registered name or profile to access a website, all the information they have published will form their active digital footprint. An active digital footprint also remains when subscribing to newsletters, filling out online forms, or agreeing to accept cookies in the browser.

A passive digital footprint differs from an active one in that it is created when information about a user is collected without the user's knowledge. This happens, for example, when a website collects information about how many times a user has visited the site, their location and IP-address. Based on the passive footprint, advertisers can analyse person's likes, comments and reposts on social media to further select the most appropriate type of content and adverts for you and show it [4].

In this article we report the results of the survey, carried out among BSUIR students. The study is based on a survey conducted using the user-friendly and accessible Google Forms platform. In this platform after the end of the survey it is possible to view the statistics of responses, build graphs and draw conclusions based on the obtained data. The analysis of the results revealed important trends and challenges in the field of digital security and privacy, which can contribute to the development of the most effective strategies to protect data and personal information in today's digital world.

The survey results show that a significant proportion of respondents expressed doubts about the level of privacy of their personal data on the Internet. This indicates a widespread distrust among users about the protection of their personal information in the online environment. Figure 1 shows the results of the survey.
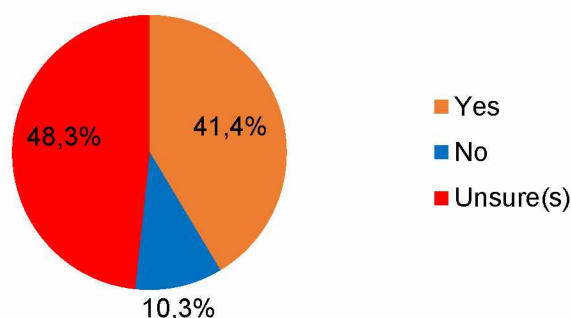

Figure 1 – Results of the questionnaire on the question "Do you feel that your privacy on the Internet is protected?"

Internet users' mistrust can arise from frequent data breaches, companies' misuse of the data they provide, and the rise of cybercrime.

The survey revealed that financial data, geolocation and private messaging are considered most important for privacy. The results of the survey are presented in Figure 2.
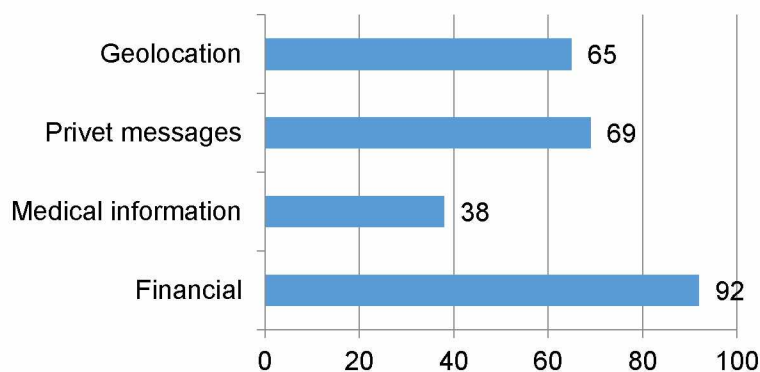
Figure 2 – Questionnaire results about most important factors for maintaining confidentiality

Financial information is considered one of the most sensitive for the following reasons: leaking such information can lead to identity theft, fraud, access to other personal information, and even threats to personal safety.

The majority of participants rate their level of awareness of digital security as average, but there is also a significant proportion who have a low level of awareness. The results of the survey are presented in Figure 3.
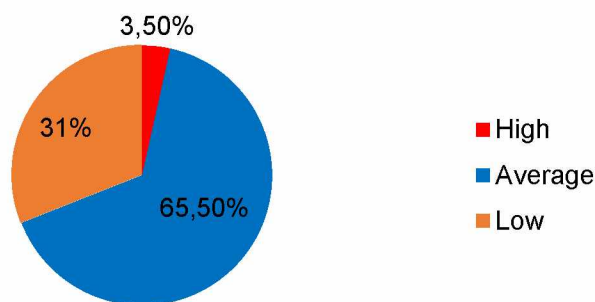

Figure 3 – Participants' responses about their level of digital literacy

Based on the responses, it can be concluded that the low level of digital literacy on the Internet arises from a lack of digital and security knowledge and skills.

A person's digital footprint reflects their online presence and includes all of their online activities. These activities range from a cursory search using engines such as Google or watching films on Netflix, to more important tasks that make everyday life easier, such as communicating by email or completing financial tasks through online banking [5].

Thus, the results of this study show that it is important to think about what your digital footprint says about you. It is worth learning how to manage your digital footprint, to be cautious in your online activities, to increase your awareness of digital security, and to control potentially collected data.

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