

Personal Report: My Hands-On Experience with a VPN

Objective: The goal of this exercise was to move beyond the theoretical concept of a VPN and gain a practical, first-hand understanding of how it works. I wanted to personally test its setup process, its effect on my internet connection, and evaluate its real-world benefits and limitations from my location in Chennai.

1. Setup and First Impressions

For this test, I chose to use ProtonVPN, primarily because its free tier offered unlimited data, which was ideal for thorough testing. The process was surprisingly straightforward:

- **Sign-up:** I created an account on their website using just my email.
- **Installation:** I downloaded the app directly from the Google Play Store onto my phone.
- **Login:** The app interface was clean and simple. After logging in, my phone prompted me to allow the app to create a "VPN configuration." I accepted this, and the setup was complete.

My Feedback: The initial setup was much easier than I anticipated. I was ready to go in less than five minutes. The process felt accessible even for someone who isn't highly technical.

2. The First Connection: A Moment of Realisation

With the app open, I used the "Quick Connect" feature. The app connected me to a server in the Netherlands. A small key icon appeared in my phone's status bar, indicating the VPN was active.

To verify it was working, I immediately opened my browser and went to whatismyipaddress.com. The result was the most impactful part of this entire experience. The website no longer showed my real IP address or my location as Chennai, India. Instead, it displayed an IP address based in Amsterdam. Seeing this tangible proof that my digital location had been successfully masked was the moment the concept of a VPN became real to me.

3. Real-World Usage and Feedback

I used the VPN for about an hour to simulate regular use.

- **General Browsing:** Websites like news portals and blogs loaded fine, perhaps a fraction of a second slower than usual, but it was barely noticeable.
- **Social Media:** Apps like Instagram and Twitter worked perfectly.
- **Public Wi-Fi Test:** The most practical test was connecting to the public Wi-Fi at a local café here in Chennai. Normally, I avoid doing anything sensitive on these networks. However, with the VPN active, I felt a genuine sense of security knowing my connection was encrypted. This was a significant psychological benefit; I was no longer worried about potential snooping on the unsecured network.

My Feedback: For everyday tasks like browsing and social media, the VPN worked seamlessly in the background. The feeling of security it provided on public Wi-Fi was its most valuable feature for me.

4. Performance Limitations: The Speed Test

The biggest trade-off became clear when I ran a speed test.

- **Without VPN:** My normal internet speed was approximately 50 Mbps.
- **With VPN (Connected to the Netherlands):** My speed dropped to around 15 Mbps.

My Feedback: This was a major, noticeable decrease in performance. Routing my traffic all the way from Chennai to a server in Europe and back clearly has a significant impact on speed. While it was fast enough for browsing, it would likely be a problem for high-bandwidth activities like streaming high-definition video or online gaming. This is a clear trade-off: I sacrificed speed for privacy and security.

5. Overall Conclusion and Final Thoughts

This hands-on report confirms that a VPN is a powerful and accessible tool for personal digital privacy.

- **What I Liked Most:** The ease of use and the immediate, verifiable proof that my IP address was hidden. The sense of security on public Wi-Fi was undeniable.
- **What I Disliked Most:** The significant drop in internet speed. It's a compromise that users must be willing to make. I also understand that I am placing my trust in the VPN provider, which is why choosing a reputable one is so important.

In conclusion, this experience was invaluable. A VPN is no longer just an abstract term to me; it is a practical tool I can now use confidently. I understand that it is an essential asset for security on public networks and for protecting my digital footprint, as long as I am

aware of the performance trade-offs and the importance of choosing a trustworthy provider.