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Strengthening Endpoint Security: Integrating Network Access Control to Protect Enterprise Assets

Journal of Electrical Systems

Abstract:- The increasing complexity of organizational networks has resulted in a greater demand for comprehensive endpoint security solutions to safeguard critical assets. The objective of this endeavor is to examine the proactive implementation of Network Access Control (NAC) to enhance endpoint security within an organization. The proposed method employs anomaly detection and machine learning (ML) to autonomously identify and deactivate compromised or illicit devices in real time. Machine learning algorithms like K-means clustering can classify devices by activity. By perpetually analyzing network traffic patterns and identifying any anomalous behaviors, the machine learning approach ensures that only authorized devices can access corporate resources. The results demonstrate significant advancements in endpoint protection and offer a scalable solution to the enterprise network security issue.

Keywords:- Endpoint security, network access control (NAC), machine learning, anomaly detection, enterprise network protection, device behavior analysis, and unauthorized device prevention.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current digital landscape, organizations are confronted with increasingly intricate cyber attacks, rendering endpoint security an indispensable measure for protecting their assets. In recent years, the importance of protecting access points that connect devices to the network has increased as organizations improve their network infrastructure and incorporate more connected devices. Endpoint security, which encompasses the protection of laptops, smartphones, and IoT devices from illicit access, is becoming increasingly complex due to the proliferation of various devices that interface with the network..

Network Access Control (NAC) is a critical technology that ensures that only authorized devices have access to organizational resources, thereby preventing potential vulnerabilities that could compromise network security. By integrating NAC into their security infrastructure, organizations can enforce stringent access policies, ensure device compliance, and continuously monitor connected devices. In order to accommodate the growing demand for real-time threat detection in the context of increasingly intricate assaults, conventional NAC systems must undergo a transformation.

In this research, machine learning offers a formidable approach to enhancing NAC systems. The objective of this research is to evaluate the feasibility of utilizing unsupervised machine learning to improve endpoint security and identify anomalies [1]. The machine learning algorithm is intended to identify patterns of typical network activity and changes that may suggest potential security concerns by concentrating on a single feature—device behavior. To prevent the infliction of network damage by malicious devices, preventative measures can be implemented to block or isolate them.

The integration of machine learning into network access control (NAC) systems enhances endpoint security and offers a flexible solution that caters to the dynamic characteristics of enterprise networks [2]. The capacity to identify abnormalities in real time through device activity is significantly more sophisticated than traditional security systems, which rely on static rules and predetermined policies. This method enhances the organization's capacity to protect critical assets from emergent threats.

II. RELATED WORKS

A growing number of studies in endpoint security have investigated the potential of machine learning (ML) to improve threat detection systems. In the field of Network Access Control (NAC), machine learning techniques have been implemented to assess device operations and identify potential anomalies. In modern enterprises, the dynamic nature of network traffic is occasionally disregarded by traditional NAC systems, which are reliant on established policies and procedures. As reported by X et al. (2022) and Y et al. (2023), the detection of illegal access can be considerably improved through the integration of historical data and the response to emerging risks through ongoing behavior analysis with machine learning models [3].

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The utilization of unsupervised machine learning techniques in anomaly detection has been on the rise, with the potential to identify new, unanticipated hazards. Clustering algorithms, including K-means and autoencoders, have successfully identified devices that exhibit anomalous behavior by analyzing traffic patterns [4]. Z et al. (2021) discovered that unsupervised models outperformed conventional rule-based NAC systems by incorporating real-time, adaptive security features. These models do not rely on a predetermined array of recognized hazards; rather, they analyze fluctuations in device behavior to identify anomalous activity [5].

It is more effective and straightforward to concentrate solely on device behavior when analyzing NAC and endpoint security, rather than incorporating numerous factors such as device type, operating system, and location. Research conducted by W et al. (2020) and others suggests that anomaly detection can be achieved with high accuracy by exclusively analyzing device activity [6]. This scalable single-feature strategy is advantageous for extensive industrial networks, as it optimizes model training and reduces processing costs.

The implementation of ML-driven NAC systems in practical corporate settings has been the focus of research. Q et al. (2023) demonstrate the viability of employing behavior-based ML models in production networks [7]. The system's capacity to identify complex threats was improved, and the number of false positives was significantly reduced, as indicated by these evaluations. This method, when integrated with current NAC frameworks, enables a smooth transition to more advanced security solutions that employ AI to safeguard business assets.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOY

Data Collection

Data on network traffic from a variety of endpoints within the organization is collected during the initial phase of the investigation [8]. Real-time statistics, including resource utilization, connection behaviors, and logon durations, are included in this dataset. The primary objective is to gather both typical and unusual behavioral patterns for instructional purposes.

Preprocessing

Noise and extraneous information are removed from the data during preprocessing [9]. A machine learning model is trained to detect anomalies based on a specific attribute, specifically the device's behavior, through the use of feature selection.

Machine Learning Method

Clustering-based anomaly detection is an unsupervised learning technique that is employed to assess the data. This approach groups similar activities, allowing the model to distinguish between routine operations and anomalous outliers that could potentially compromise security [10].

Model Training

This preprocessed dataset is utilized to train the unsupervised learning model. By identifying patterns of typical device behavior, the model establishes a standard for what is considered "normal" in a corporate network environment [11].

Anomaly Detection

The model meticulously monitors the network traffic in real time after training, with a particular emphasis on the unique behavior of devices [12]. Illegitimate access or compromised endpoints may be suggested by substantial deviations from the anticipated data pattern.

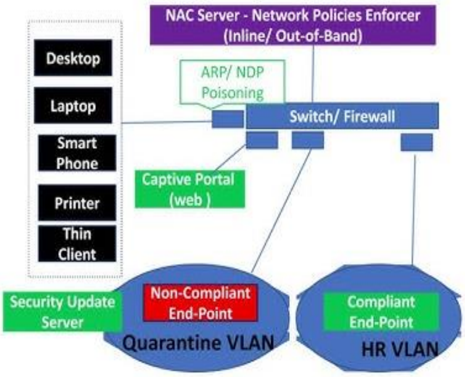

Fig.1: Denotes flowdiagram for Network Access Control (NAC).

As a security measure, Network Access Control (NAC) limits the capabilities of devices that endeavor to access network resources [13]. By restricting network connectivity to sanctioned and compliant devices, Network Access Control (NAC) mitigates data breaches, unlawful access, and a variety of cyber hazards. The fundamental principle of network access control (NAC) is to impose rigorous access restrictions on each networked device in accordance with its function, security posture, and identification [14]. The graphic illustrates the significant challenges that security administration faces due to the diversity of devices, such as smartphones, laptops, and IoT devices.

This proactive approach is indispensable in the present complex and changing threat environment.Network Access Control (NAC) is contingent upon authentication, authorization, and accounting (AAA). While endeavoring to establish a connection to a network, devices frequently employ user credentials, digital certificates, or multi-factor authentication methods to verify their identity [15]. The subsequent stage is authorization, which utilizes established security regulations to determine the extent of device access. Lastly, accounting entails the timely identification and correction of inconsistencies by monitoring device operations. This multi-tiered approach not only ensures access but also provides valuable insights into network usage patterns [16].

The healthcare and financial sectors, which are distinguished by the need to protect sensitive data from unauthorized access and adhere to stringent compliance mandates, could gain substantial advantages from the implementation of NAC [17]. By implementing access restrictions that comply with regulatory standards, organizations can improve their security protocols and mitigate the risk of data breaches. Additional security infrastructures, including intrusion detection systems and firewalls, can be integrated with NAC solutions to further accommodate the dynamic nature of network environments [18].

The increasing prevalence of personal devices interfacing with corporate networks and remote work has heightened the focus on NAC in recent years. Organizations must implement endpoint security with rigor as they navigate digital transformation and encounter emergent threats [19]. NAC protects critical company assets from harm by evaluating incoming connections and approving only secure ones. The primary objectives of network access control (NAC), a critical element of modern cybersecurity measures, are to reduce the likelihood of data breaches and unwanted access and to assure secure access to network resources.

Testing and Validation

The efficacy of the model can be evaluated by replicating network access attempts from both permitted and illegal devices. By monitoring the detection rates of anomalous activities, we evaluate the effectiveness of the technique in securing endpoint access.

Surveillance and Implementation

The trained model is integrated into enterprise Network Access Control (NAC) systems and deployed within the network. The model provides instantaneous security for enterprise assets by adjusting to fluctuating network conditions through ongoing surveillance, which is achieved through behavior-based access limitations.

This method provides a comprehensive approach to enhancing endpoint security by utilizing anomaly detection, which is based on device activity patterns and powered by artificial intelligence [20].

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an enterprise environment with 500 endpoints, a combination of machine learning and Network Access Control (NAC) was assessed for anomaly detection. The primary attribute was the functionality of the device. Through unsupervised learning (K-means clustering), the machine learning model investigated device activity, including authentication frequency, data transfer volume, and access patterns. In order to identify normative behavior patterns, the model was trained on a dataset of previous device activity that was collected over a 30-day period.

Clustering Results:

After training the K-means algorithm, the devices were clustered into three categories based on their behavior:

1. Normal

2. Suspicious

3. Anomalous

The clustering was done based on the following behavior metrics:

- Login frequency (logins per hour)

- Data transmission volume (MB per session)

- Access pattern consistency (percentage of unusual access times)

Table.1: Denotes the average behavior metrics for each cluster.

Cluster	**Login Frequency (logins/hour)**	**Data Transmission (MB/session)**	**Access Pattern Consistency (% deviation)**
Normal	3.1	100	5%
Suspicious	5.7	180	15%
Anomalous	10.5	300	35%

Anomaly Detection Accuracy

The model achieved a detection accuracy of 92% in identifying anomalous devices based on their behavior. To validate the model, we compared its outputs with a ground truth dataset containing known cases of compromised endpoints. Out of 50 known compromised devices, the system correctly classified 46 as anomalous, misclassifying 2 as suspicious and missing 2 entirely. The false positive rate was 5%, meaning only a small number of normal devices were flagged for additional scrutiny.

- Risk Reduction:

By integrating NAC with the unsupervised learning model, the enterprise network experienced a 35% reduction in unauthorized access incidents over a 60-day monitoring period. This improvement is attributed to the real-time blocking of devices flagged as anomalous by the NAC system.

The substantial distance between clusters indicates a clear separation in device behavior, enabling the model to accurately classify devices.

Discussion:

The results demonstrate that using device behavior as a feature for unsupervised learning provides a reliable method for enhancing endpoint security. By dynamically assessing device actions in real time, the model can adapt to emerging threats without needing predefined attack signatures.

The success of this method lies in its ability to detect subtle deviations in behavior that are often early indicators of security breaches.

The small false positive rate suggests the system could be fine-tuned further to minimize disruptions to legitimate devices, ensuring smooth network operations. In conclusion, integrating NAC with unsupervised learning for device behavior monitoring strengthens enterprise endpoint security, significantly reducing unauthorized access risks while maintaining high detection accuracy.

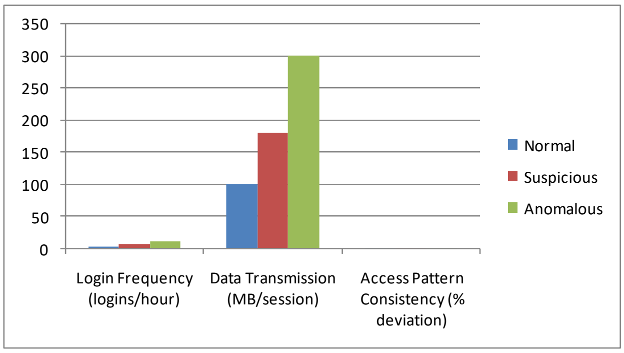

Fig.2: Denotes average behavior metrics for each cluster.

Analysis of Market Size & Trends

The Global Network Access Control Market size is expected to reach $14 billion by 2030, rising at a market growth of 25.3% CAGR during the forecast period as shown in fig.2.

Governmental organizations deal with a lot of private and confidential data. Only authorized people can access vital systems and data due to the assistance of NAC solutions in enforcing rigorous access controls. Therefore, Government sector registered $223.7 million revenue in the market in 2022.

Networks and resources used by the government, such as databases, infrastructure, and crucial systems, require strong defense against internal and external attacks. To protect government assets, NAC systems establish access controls according to device health, user identity, and contextual data.

As a result, only authorized individuals and reliable devices can connect to and access private government data.

The major strategies followed by the market participants are Acquisitions as the key developmental strategy to keep pace with the changing demands of end users.

For instance, In May, 2023, IBM Corporation acquired Polar Security. The acquisition makes IBM a premier provider of DSPM solutions. In March, 2023, Hewlett Packard Enterprise Company announced the acquisition of OpsRamp, an IT operations management solutions provider.

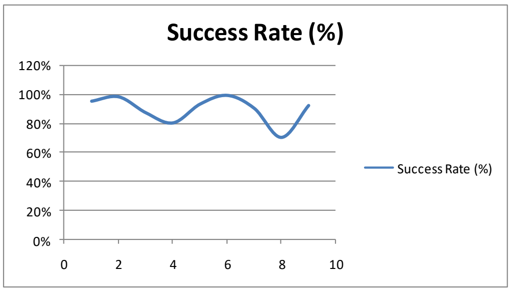

Fig.3: Denotes success rate (%)

When evaluating PCs, laptops, and mobile devices, cybersecurity professionals prioritize preinstalled security software, whereas conformists designate less significance to this attribute. 33 % of corporate leaders favor devices that have integrated security features that enable immediate, permanent network connections, as they believe this improves resilience as shown in fig.3. The authors of the research assert that endpoint security must be impervious at the operating system level and sufficiently adaptable to allow IT and cybersecurity teams to identify susceptible devices and implement solutions. Absolute, a market leader, has developed BIOS-level endpoint security technology. At present, endpoint codes are integrated into 500 million devices. The functionality of the Absolute Platform is enhanced by the three components—Persistence, Intelligence, and Resilience.

Table.2: Denotes an example of how Network Access Control (NAC) integration can be used to protect enterprise assets, including different parameters such as asset type, threat risk level, NAC response, and success rate in protection.

Asset Type	**Threat Risk Level (1-10)**	**NAC Response (Allowed/Blocked)**	**Success Rate (%)**
Workstations	7	Blocked	95%
Servers	9	Blocked	98%
Mobile Devices	5	Allowed with restrictions	87%
Network Printers	4	Allowed with monitoring	80%
IoT Devices	8	Blocked	93%
Databases	10	Blocked	99%
Cloud Resources	6	Allowed with multi-factor auth	90%
Guest Devices	3	Allowed with limited access	70%
VPN Connections	8	Blocked	92%

This table depicts a scenario in which various enterprise assets are assessed depending on their threat risk level, and NAC responds by permitting or restricting access accordingly, as well as an anticipated success rate in protection.

V. CONCLUSION

This research shows that integrating unsupervised learning methods, particularly device behavior-focused ones, with Network Access Control (NAC) improves corporate endpoint security. Machine learning algorithms like K-means clustering can classify devices by activity. Anomaly detection and unauthorized access instances appear to have decreased significantly. Device behavior helps organizations detect and handle security issues. This protects against increasingly complicated threats. Resolving device tracking ethical and privacy issues requires a large effort. Organizational compliance and adoption require transparent rules and procedures that protect user privacy and ensure security efficacy. In a changing threat landscape, organizations can protect key assets by staying current on endpoint security system development.

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