

REVIEW ARTICLE

A METHODOLOGICAL REVIEW ON APPLICATIONS OF BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY AND ITS LIMITATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Earlier, Blockchain technology was used mainly for Crypto-currency, which visualizes the Bitcoin and Blockchain technology as identical. As of now around 3000 crypto-currencies are present, among them Bitcoin is the largest Crypto-currency. This paper presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of the applications of Blockchain technology over different areas. This paper focuses on various areas and applications where Blockchain technology is used. Researchers and academicians have utilized Blockchain in numerous fields. Based on the previous works, a universal classification of Blockchain based application is considered of various domains such as financial application, integrity verification, governance, Internet of Things (IOT), health care management, privacy and security, education and data management etc. This paper also converses about the few of the limitations of Blockchain technology.

KEYWORDS

Application, Bitcoin, Blockchain, Crypto-currency, Digital Ledger, Digital Signature, Trusted Time Stamping.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1991, Stuart Haber and W. Scott Stornetta have published a paper 'How to time stamp a digital document' (Scott, 1991). The objective behind this paper was to extend the use of audio, video and text documents in digital form. The author proposed a solution that provides the time stamps of the users. The time stamping used provided the digital footage as soon as the document is created or modified. In the provided solution, the hash of the documents were calculated and sent to Trusted Time Stamping (TTS) followed by digital signature of the document using digital signature and then sent to the client. In other solution, the need for centralized TSS evade and the hashes of documents were calculated (Scott, 1991).

In the succession Satoshi and Nakamoto published paper in 2008 and in 2009, referring to Stuart Haber and W. Scott Stornetta (1991, 1993, 1997) and additional (Nakamoto, 2008). They launched Bitcoin software using Blockchain technology which came into limelight. The concept of Blockchain technology was discussed by many but Satoshi and Nakamoto made the technology in trend by creating the concept of digital currency (Crypto-currency) that became popular. Bitcoin works on distributed peer to peer (P2P) network technology i.e. Crypto-currency or digital assets exchange via a distributed network. The proposed solution evades the double spending problem by using peer to peer network. Some characteristics of Blockchain technology are security, robustness, transparency and audibility. The details of transactions in Blockchain are stored in blocks and each block is linked with the previous block to form chain and every block contains a hash of previous block.

Blockchain technology works on a decentralized system i.e. there is no central authority which has lone power (Nakamoto, 2008).

A. *Public Blockchain*: As the name suggests it is open for public, completely decentralized and distributed. By entering into the Blockchain platform one can behave as authorized node and can perform transactions by becoming a part of the Blockchain network. The node even starts mining. Some famous Blockchain platforms are Bitcoin, Ethereum and Litecoin. In public Blockchain decision making takes place using consensus algorithm that shows the proof of work.

B. *Private Blockchain*: It is a closed Blockchain network and not completely decentralized. Private Blockchain belongs to an individual or organization. The decision making rights are in hand of a central authority i.e. whom to give mining rights. The examples of private Blockchain are Hyperledger fabric, Corda, Ripple (XRP).

C. *Consortium Blockchain*: It is a semi-decentralized Blockchain. In these more than one organization has the right to manage Blockchain networks. Examples of consortium Blockchain are Quorum and Hyperledger.

D. *Hybrid Blockchain*: Hybrid Blockchain combines properties of both private Blockchain and public Blockchain. The Benefits of hybrid Blockchain can be seen under business that is there is a facility by which they can show the data which they want and keep private data safe by hiding those. Example of a hybrid Blockchain is Dragon chain (Sharma, 2019).

Based on the intended audience, the evolution of Blockchain can be recognized as Blockchain 1.0. Due to implementation of Distributed Ledger Technology (DLT) first application was Crypto-currency. The first Crypto-currency introduced was Bitcoin and now it is the most popular and famous currency. Blockchain 2.0 includes smart contract, tiny computer programs present in Blockchain. Smart contracts reduce the

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Figure 2: Blockchain Applications

3.5 Internet of Things

According to a study, 90% of the total data in the world is created in the last four years (Marketing, 2017). The reason behind this rapid increase of data is: one is the arrival of the Internet of Things, secondly, the population growth. Blockchain technology and its capabilities are driving the attention to invest in implementation of decentralized IOT platforms (Novo and Oscar, 2018). When plenty of smart devices are interconnected in heterogeneous scenarios, it provides secure and auditable data exchange. One more merit of decentralized fashion is high scalability and skilful management (Sharma et al., 2017a).

One can gain secure and real time payment services and the traditional commerce can be enhanced. FileCoin is one of the Applications which are a memory storage provider. API calls monetisation can be enabled by EtherAPI's. In the coming years, IOT technology can be utilized to connect devices with their accounts which are based on Crypto-currency (Christidis et al., 2016). As a result, micro transactions can be executed in exchange for services. Several problems can be resolved such as high maintenance expenses of centralized systems. The security of IOT and wireless sensor networks (WSN) can be increased by decentralized and secure P2P models (Daza et al., 2017).

On the other hand, IOT also has certain demerits including low computational power and storage capabilities of IOT devices; this restricts the use of Blockchain. A previous study has put forward an alternative way through which drawbacks can be overcome and IOT Applications can be enhanced (BuccaFurri et al., 2017). Recent research presented a lightweight and simple Blockchain based architecture for IOT (Dorri et al., 2017).

3.6 Healthcare Management

Blockchain technology has various Applications in the healthcare Industry including online patient access, sharing patient's medical data, public health care management and many more (Patel et al., 2019). The patient's medical record, data, prescriptions, medical history can be easily managed and accessed by Electronic Healthcare Records (HER). EHR uses Blockchain as a protocol thus guarantees security as well as privacy of patient's data (Xia et al., 2017). It stores the records in a distributed way, there is no centralized hub in the system which can be breached or corrupted by hackers. The data is collected and gathered from diverse sources and unified in a single storage (Grey Healthcare Group, 2017).

The data is publicly accessed and verifiable across non-affiliated provider organizations. It also maintains the information related to the patient's clinical progress throughout the treatment. It is the area where the Blockchain has the highest growth rate in healthcare management. Blockchain is also beneficial in areas like clinic trial, precision, medicine, drug counterfeiting, and user oriented medical research.

3.7 Privacy and Security

The huge amount of personal and sensitive data is present in both public and private authorities. Even though General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) controls the processing of data but then also there is a need for high security. This gap can be filled using Blockchain platform (Politou et al., 2018). It can amplify the security and scalability of big data. This is done by using efficient data storage systems implemented on data mining methods (Bozic et al., 2016).

A decentralized version of Domain Name Server (DNS) can be established by namecoin which is an open source Blockchain (Haferkorn et al., 2014). DNS offers security, efficiency and privacy. Alexandria is another example of open source Blockchain model which is a decentralized library providing freedom of speech to every individual. The concept of digital identity services can be implemented in both the systems. In this way it enables security by verifying every individual's identity (Zhang et al., 2017). A study proposed three types of identities of Blockchain P2P protocol. 1) The services provided by Applications in which user's credentials are accessed for operational and business related motive. 2) Nodes that maintain the Blockchain and get rewards in exchange. 3) The users can interact with Applications (Zyskind et al., 2015).

A Blockchain based smartphone is developed by SIRIN LABS which enables fee less, secure and fast transactions (Labs, 2014). There is an

antimalware in the market named BitAv which increases virus pattern distribution (Noyes et al., 2016). In this way, it can enhance security and reliability in distributed networks also.

Limitation: There are several methods which are proposed to enrich the transactional security such as mixing services or zero knowledge proof. In former methods, the funds are transferred from N input addresses to M output addresses. In this way, users avoid using the same address again. The Applications which implement this method are mixcoin and coinjoin though there are methods available for transaction security but then also it is one of the most challenging aspects (Bonneau et al., 2014).

3.8 Education

In a universal learning environment, the issues such as vulnerability, security and privacy can be resolved by Blockchain (Bdiwi et al., 2017). The Educational records and reputations can be stored in Blockchain (Sharples et al., 2016). Other study also proposed the use of Blockchain based distributed systems for reputation systems (Dennis et al., 2015). In previous study, blocks are added in Blockchain related to the achievements and rewards of students by teachers (Devine et al., 2015). We can provide more security by implementing Educational Certificate Management by Blockchain. Moreover, the academic learning process can be enhanced using Blockchain. This includes collecting, analyzing and reporting of data for improving decision making (Grech et al., 2017). Blockchain can be further be utilized for publishing manuscripts as well as its verification (Spearpoint et al., 2017).

3.9 Business and Industrial

Business and industries are shifting towards Blockchain because it provides transparency, enhanced security, improves traceability and reduced costs by removing third parties. Currently many e-business models are adopting Blockchain technology. Many authors have proposed business ideas in which transactions between nodes are done through smart contracts on distributed ledger Blockchain (Zhang et al., 2015). In the e-commerce sector Blockchain is very useful because it brings transparency in transaction and transactions are tamper proof, so trust among buyers' increases. The authors also consider the importance of food safety and agro-food supply chain traceability using Blockchain technology (Tian and Feng, 2016).

4. LIMITATIONS

After explorations of several papers in relevant fields, limitations and usability of Blockchain can be derived. Nowadays Blockchain technology is adopted in many research fields and business fields but every emerging technology has its challenges and limitations. In this section, some of its limitations are discussed.

4.1 Suitability of Blockchain

Across the world many companies and different sectors are moving towards Blockchain technology. Before adopting Blockchain technology one should inspect the system requirements and suitability of Blockchain based solutions. There are a restricted number of frameworks designed in the methodical literature to estimate the suitability of Blockchain based Application.

Databases are mutable in nature i.e. in database prebuilt entities have access to modify and insert in database. The prebuilt entities may have precise roles, but their roles are known like authorized users can only insert into database but not have right to change content of database whereas owner can completely alter database whether database is centralized or decentralized i.e. owner can delete content or completely change structure of database.

4.2 Latency and Scalability

Nowadays online transactions such as Unified Payment Interface (UPI) and internet banking or transactions through credit/debit cards are done in a few seconds but in case of Bitcoin transactions it takes approximately 10 minutes to add a block, this network time is also known as Block-Time. Therefore, Blockchain architecture faces some serious latency issues.

A recent study has proposed the idea to decouple a block into two parts also called Bitcoin next generation. One key block is for leader election and another micro block to store transactions. So, nodes compete to become

leaders and competition among nodes is responsible for micro block generation (Eyal et al., 2016).

4.3 Quantum Resilience

In Blockchain, there are two major primitives for signing the transaction: hash key and public key encryption. SHA-256 algorithm is most commonly used in hashing. Using Grover's algorithm, a quantum computer needs 2^{128} to crack this algorithm. This makes SHA-256 unaffected by quantum. On the other hand, Elliptic Curve Digital Signature Algorithm (ECDSA) is used for public key encryption. It can be broken once a big enough quantum computer is built. Most of the block chains practice public key encryption. This makes Blockchain insecure.

4.4 Blockchain Implementation and Interoperability

Blockchain Applications are increasing rapidly. The diverse implementation of Blockchain leads to a hard interoperability issues. Most of the companies in the US are conspiring to fetch Bitcoin exchange traded funds to the market (Bitcoin, 2018). It would be easy for the users and international funds to invest in Bitcoin, if it would be regulated properly. But due to unregulated development Crypto-currency, resulted in spectacular attacks (Rochard, 2014). This may also lead to malicious currency exchange results in crisis.

4.5 Data Management, Privacy and Security

Blockchain provides benefits regarding security and privacy of data management however it has some limitations also (Lin et al., 2017). Today also, privacy and confidentiality is an issue. The confidentiality of data can be achieved by adapting several implementation mechanisms (Greenspan and Gideon, 2015). However, it depends on implementation methodology, context of the system i.e. (for example IOT networks are required for some implementations). Thus it is not a panacea.

4.6 Big Data and Artificial Intelligence

Nowadays whatever activity we do on the internet is watched and data is stored. Based on data accessed, websites recommend us according to our likes and dislikes. Problem of managing big data can be solved by Blockchain secure and verifiable structure (Karafiloski et al., 2017). Artificial intelligence is adopted in almost every field. Artificial intelligence solutions can be implemented by smart contracts, to manage its particular characteristics.

Obviously, the utilization of AI and big data empower many fascinating and interesting Blockchain based Applications which could increase the transparency of such technologies.

5. CONCLUSION

Blockchain has diverse Applications but also has some limitations. There is a requirement to address all such issues. As a result, Blockchain offers durability, scalability as well as high efficiency. The highlights of this technology are not unique if analyzed individually but the combined implementation of all these features make it ideal for all requirements.

As the Blockchain will be more developed, more the Applications will increase, more the interest of industries will increase. However, many researchers are trying to utilize Blockchain instead of traditional databases. But, it is projected that traditional databases are best for some scenarios. Thus, Blockchain cannot be a universal remedy.

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