

Reaching Scientific Consensus, The Decentralised Opportunity for Trust and Access

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Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction	2
Purpose, Intended Use and Audience	2
The peer-reviewing process	3
Goals and Requirements	4
Goals	4
Requirements	4
Exploratory Analysis	4
Decentralised	4
peer 2 peer, P2P	5
Interplanetary File System	5
Content Identifiers	5
Distributed Hash Tables	5
Kubo (Golang on IPFS)	5
Databases	5
Gun.js	5
OrbitDB	5
ThreadDB	6
Blockchain	6
Ethereum	6
Ethers.js	6
Metamask	6
Smart Contracts and Solidity	6
Methodology	6
Development cycle?	6
Use Case Diagram	6
An Agile Approach with Kanban	6
Test-Driven-Development	6
Continuous Integration/Development	6
Results	7
Discussion	7
Conclusion	7
References	7
Bibliography	7

Abstract

// Temporary //

The purpose of this project is to create a system for the publication of scientific articles which can be reviewed publicly where every reviewer is in possession of a digital signature for verification. Utilising the Metamask wallet browser extension and app, In order to log in to the web app and to verify identity, this wallet secures each users contributions

The contents of the website are distributed between all members of via IPFS a decentralised system, this is where the website will be hosted/distributed.

Introduction

“In economics, a public good is a good that is both non-excludable and non-rivalrous. For such goods, users cannot be barred from accessing or using them for failing to pay for them. Also, use by one person neither prevents access of other people nor does it reduce availability to others.” **(Oakland, 1987)**

Non-excludability means it is made impossible to exclude any individual from consuming the good. It is possible to create excludability by means of pay-walls and membership only access.

Non-rivalrous, is the accessibility of a product or good that in the consumption does not affect the availability for subsequent use, In this manner a digital good can be classified as such.

Purpose, Intended Use and Audience

Before the internet distribution of academic articles to a global audience was extremely difficult, it required proof-reading, typesetting, printing and distribution. However since the ubiquity of the Internet the majority of tasks performed by publishers has shrunk enormously, in fact publishers now expect researchers to submit digital copies of their work that require no further typesetting or processing and as for digital distribution printing has become unnecessary. Copying is now simple and free and worldwide distribution is instantaneous online. **(Taylor, 2012)**

According to **(Chow & Birdwell, 2022)** There is an increased distrust in scientific research in many fields of study and the main purpose of this system is to remove the corporate and empirical structure of the current journal publication where in many cases corporations have been found to create and promote articles with bias towards certain priorities that suit the business opportunities of the corporation and not the actual scientific consensus.

For example in Coca-Cola and Mars sponsored research, publications appear to skew the evidence towards solutions that favour industry interests by focusing on food components that can be manipulated and marketed by food companies. Shaping the debate around scientific methods can be another strategy that corporations use for their benefit to raise doubts about the methods used in non-industry sponsored research **(Fabbri et al., 2018)**..

It has become necessary to provide an alternative to the profit driven publications which provide no tangible system to counteract the manipulation by corporations.

“The European Universities Association (EUA) found that overall expenditure by 26 European countries was €597 million (£515 million) in 2017. But 75% of that – some €451 million – was spent on subscriptions to journals published by the ‘big five’: Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley, Taylor & Francis and the American Chemical Society (ACS)” **(Mehta, 2019)**.

With all this in mind it is clear that there is a necessity for Academic Journal Publishing Reform. For better access, trust and incentive to contribute to the archive of journals for everyone’s benefit.

Originally coined by Nick Szabo “Smart Contracts” are electronic agreements that are immutable and transparent, deployed on a decentralised blockchain. Meaning they cannot be altered, automatically execute and everyone sees the terms of the agreement. By utilising the trust that smart contracts provide it will enable researchers to contribute, publish and peer-review articles removing the ability for manipulation and bias towards results, by moving the actions of reviewers and researchers to a proof-of-work model on a blockchain. Benefits of this is there will be no need for a subscription/fee based model for accessing research as the researchers themselves will own the rights to their own work by staking them on the blockchain and also researchers and Academics will be able to earn passive income off the favourable and positive contributions to the emerging consensus.

At the moment the peer-review process is centralised in the hands of the publishers. Should this process be decentralised.....it’ll be interesting to see what happens.

The peer-reviewing process

Peer review generally works like this;

The researcher writes a paper and submits it to a journal.

The editor who is put in charge of the paper selects a number of other researchers to offer the paper to. There is some say as to who the reviewers are (e.g. one can explicitly ask the editor not to have certain other authors review the work, and can also explicitly ask for certain reviewers), and in some cases the journal will explicitly ask for a list of potential reviewers, but final authority comes down to the editor.

The reviewers read and critique the paper, send their recommendations back to the editor, who then returns the information back to the authors along with their decision as to publication (typically, the editors request specific revisions prior to publication).

The researcher makes revisions, and returns the paper to the editor, who then will make the final call as to publication (typically, this is dependent on the addressing all of the various concerns of the reviewers).

This obviously has a lot of room for problems, and one has to trust the journals to do their due diligence and ensure the process works out correctly. In this manner the reputation of the journal is the key to judging the works published in said journal. Furthermore, many journals group themselves into one of the bigger publishing houses (like Elsevier, Springer, Taylor & Francis, etc.), and those publishers like to keep their journals reputable.

Granted, many journals have issues and often can be a pay-to-publish journal. These journals have what is typically branded as “expedited peer review,” which may just be the editor checking for grammatical mistakes. The authors then pay a fee to publish the paper, typically marketed as a fee to publish open-source.

In addition, many “open-source” journals (particularly in engineering fields) are patent and IP trolls; you publish your work open-source with them, pay a lower fee than the pay-to-publish journals, but in the process you sign over all potential IP from the work, and the paper itself never really gets published in any major journals, but instead gets presented at a conference that you have to pay an exorbitant fee to attend.

Ultimately; it's all built on reputation. Check the journal's impact factor (which is a very rough way to judge the likelihood that a journal's paper will be cited) against other journals in that field (and don't compare across fields. Also check the publishers, as well as the location where the journal is published.

The other good rule of thumb is the reference list of any given paper, and the journals that those references are published in.

Goals and Requirements

Goals

The goal of this project is to contribute to Academic Journal Publishing Reform taking advantage of the internet in the distribution of Academic Journals and decentralised applications to support the reviewing process and in the increase in trust via the “Smart Contract” mechanism in the Ethereum Virtual Machine running on the Ethereum Blockchain.

Requirements

Exploratory Analysis

The first half of this section is research and an exploration of tech, leading to the developmental approach to be taken i.e. Agile, TDD etc.

Decentralised

According to **(IPFS, 2022)** Decentralisation is the downloading of a file or files from many locations that are not managed by a single organisation. The fundamental ethos behind decentralisation is the creation of a resilient internet where for instance if a service is under attack on the current centralised internet through a denial of service or ransomware attack the service could be disrupted, the modern internet relies on services like Amazon Web Services(AWS) to perform quick rerouting and load-balancing in such eventualities but again this is reliant on a single entity.

The driving force behind decentralised systems is to create a fast, more secure web **(Nnakwue, 2021)**. Typically a decentralised app relies on a distributed computing model where system components run using a peer-to-peer network. Where all files can be replicated or synced amongst other peers residing on the same network **(Nnakwue, 2021)**

This property of having caches of content distributed globally allows for a protocol where the content can be addressed from anywhere including remotely with little to no internet access and from a location geographically closer to the device retrieving said content.

There have been many protocols proposed to achieve these fundamental goals.

peer 2 peer, P2P

Interplanetary File System

Content Identifiers

Distributed Hash Tables

Kubo (Golang on IPFS)

Databases

Gun.js

Gun.js, created by Mark Nadal,

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OrbitDB

(Nnakwue, 2021)

OrbitDB uses IPFS as a data store in a distributed, serverless p2p database.

ThreadDB

Blockchain

Ethereum

Ethers.js

Metamask

Smart Contracts and Solidity

Methodology

Development cycle?

Use Case Diagram

An Agile Approach with Kanban

Using Trello, Sprints

Test-Driven-Development

Continuous Integration/Development

Build – We will compile the code in this stage.

Test – We will test the code in this stage. We can save both efforts as well as time can be saved by performing the techniques of automation.

Release – In this stage, we will release the application in our GitHub repository.

Deployment – We will deploy the application to the production environment.

Validation and compliance – Your organization's needs determine the steps to validate a build.

Results

Discussion

Conclusion

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